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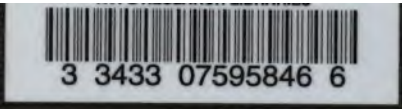
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Morgan

WOMAN

AND

HER MASTER.

WOMAN

AND

HER MASTER.

BY LADY MORGAN.

"As the old law-phrase runs, Baron et Feme—the master and his woman."

BLACKSTONE.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

PHILADELPHIA:

CAREY AND HART.

1840.

C. Sherman & Co. Printers,
19 St. James Street.

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WOMAN AND HER MASTER.

CHAPTER II.

WOMEN OF CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY CONTINUED.

The Women of Rome. During the Proscription. Under the Empire. Cornelia. Portia. Fulvia.

In the primitive state of Roman society, when women, considered as slaves, were treated as children, when men took wives without love, and lived with them without respect, the intellectual capacity of the sex was rarely felt, and never acknowledged: the idea of female agency operating upon public affairs, could not have suggested itself under a government founded on the law of the strongest. But, as civilisation advanced, and mind began to make way against brute force, the moral resources of the women were gradually brought into action.

The occasional intervention of the sex, once admitted as an expedient, was progressively adopted into the system of the republic, though without place and unrecognised. While censors condemned, and satirists ridiculed, the women acquired weight in public estimation; their complaints of wrongs long endured commanded attention; rights long withheld were gradually conceded to them;

and they would have ultimately attained to the full exercise of those intellectual and moral qualities with which nature had endowed them, if Rome herself had not submitted to influences, which, in all times and regions where they have subsisted, have checked the march of civilisation, and thrown back society upon the point from which it first started. Society in its foulest corruption, as in its original ignorance, has no political existence, but in a slavish submission to irresponsible power.

The causes which enfeebled the stoical virtues of republican Rome, and barbarized her imported refinements, have been ably detailed by the historians of eighteen hundred years: causes inherent in the nature of things, which have produced the same effects in modern states, inferior only to Rome herself. A moral corruption, (the offspring of exclusive privileges, and of the egoism of wealth and power,)—the vices of a degraded and pauperized commonalty,—the impatience of the suffering masses, sighing for the rule of a single person, (who should be the master, not the accomplice of their ferocious tyrants,)—the servility of a senate which had lost its dignity with its virtue, —and the disorganization of provinces, beggared by proconsular misgovernment,—all contributed to render the despotism of Augustus a political necessity: but the vices which his power held in abeyance, were not eradicated by his sway.

The civil contests, with the wars and proscriptions they originated, while they extinguished the expiring sparks of male virtue in the blood of the "last of the Romans," were equally unfavourable to the developement of the gentler and more domestic qualities of the women. But still their energies, if occasionally misdirected, were never subdued. Their moral influence over the fiercest spirits of the times is recorded, with the selfish crimes of their masters. The image of the intellectual Metella was ever present to Sylla in his moments of doubt and danger; and he related to a friend that she had appeared to him in a dream, warning him that he would soon join her, (as Hippias, the tyrant of Athens, dreamed he was with his mother, the night before

the battle of Marathon, where he fell,)—proving the impression she had made on a mind inaccessible to all other human ties.

The part which the frail but not unimportant Sempronia* took in the Catilinarian conspiracy, in extorting the secret of Lentulus, which had the fall of Rome for its object, and in betraying it to Cicero, if not illustrative of female virtue, at least shows the extent of female agency, in times so eventful. Cæsar, reproached with habits which must have thrown him so much into the power of women, when asked by a sarcastic censor if he "supposed that Rome would submit to female rule," replied, "And why not? Semiramis subdued the East, and the Amazons conquered Asia." His opinion of the value of the sex (however he had himself laboured to reduce it) is fully marked in his well known aphorism on his own wife, the incomparable Cornelia, the daughter of Cinna.†

But, in the midst of this universal degeneracy, there were women superior in morals, as in mind, to the men with whom they associated. The wives of Brutus and of Pompey are brilliant but not exceptional examples. Portia, the worthy daughter of Cato, astonished even Brutus by her stoical heroism, and purchased her husband's confidence, by an act of which few men, even of her own sect, were capable. Acquainted with a conspiracy which involved the lives of the most eminent men in Rome, she was at once true to her woman's love, and her cause; for though she fainted when Brutus went forth to assassinate Cæsar, she remained faithful to the great secret reposed in her. Celebrated for her philosophy and her courage, Portia died the victim of conjugal tenderness.

Even the horrible conflicts of the proscription, the type of all reigns of terror, in all ages, was relieved by the affections of woman, who carried on the tradition of humanity, when its sympathies seemed on the point of utter

* Sallust.

† Notwithstanding the infidelities of Cæsar to Cornelia, he celebrated her virtues, when dead, in the eloquent oration he pronounced over her body.

extinction. The well-timed liberality of the beautiful wife of Acilius, who distributed her wealth among the satellites of the triumvirate, and saved the life of her husband, (permitted to escape, under the escort of the very soldiers armed with poniards to kill him,)—the ingenuity of the wife of Ancius, who, inclosing her husband in a trunk, which she had carried out of their palace by porters, and then accompanied him in his perilous flight,—and, above all, the heroic courage of the mother of Mark Antony, who braved power in its most awful and most afflicting form, are prominent instances of the heroic devotedness of the women, which afford the only relief to the crimes of an age, the most profligate and abandoned in recorded history.

Mark Antony had lent himself to the proscription of his own uncle Lucius, who fled for refuge to his sister, where the assassins found him. Spreading her arms as a shield before him, she exclaimed, "Respect the uncle of your general:" the soldiers paused in their work of blood, and permitted the wretched mother to appeal to the triumvirate. The venerable Julia then presented herself in the forum, where Mark Antony and his colleagues were seated at the tribunal; and fixing her stern eyes on her son, she said, "Triumvir, I come to denounce myself as the protectress of a proscript: the law condemns us both to death—strike!" The triumvirs were abashed, and Lucius was saved.

Cornelia, the virtuous and the wise wife of Pompey, sighed not for power, nor was agitated by ambitious rivalries. Far above the personal passions that leagued her husband with Cæsar, and with Cassius, (the enemies of public liberty,) she shared his dangers, trembled for his designs, and lived and died a model of devoted wifehood.

The genius and conduct of the first wife of Mark Antony, the patrician Fulvia, had a considerable influence on public affairs during the hottest times of the civil wars. Fulvia, the daughter of Lucullus, when married to Publius Clodius, shared in all the factious intrigues of her husband, and promoted his views. On the death of Clodius (assas-

sinated on the Appian Way, by the soldiers of Milo,) she made her grief subservient to her policy; and excited a popular insurrection, by exposing the body, under the marble portico of her sumptuous dwelling, to the gaze of sympathizing multitudes. Cæsar and Pompey testified their sense of the services she had rendered them by their unlimited confidence, and by forwarding her marriage with Mark Antony. When Octavius and Antony went in pursuit of the murderer of Julius Cæsar, they resigned all power into her hands, and she governed in their absence with sovereign authority.

Indignant at the inconstancy of Mark Antony, at being abandoned by a husband to whom she was attached with that intensity which energized all her actions, and having in vain striven to wean him from Cleopatra, Fulvia attempted in her desperation to ally herself with his rival, Octavius. The world's future master received her advances with coldness; and stung with mortification, she employed the most astute devices to sow the seeds of dissension between the members of the triumvirate and their partisans. She instigated her brother-in-law, Lucius, to revolt, and aided him in raising legions of malecontents, who, after a brave stand at Perugia, were discomfited by Augustus.

Fulvia, on the loss of the battle, flew from Italy to Athens, from the vengeance of the conqueror, and to rejoin and perhaps recover the affections of the faithless husband, who had been the cause of all her indiscretions and disasters. She found him, only to be again scorned and abandoned; and her great energies breaking down under her disappointed affections, she died at Athens of a broken heart.

Octavius Cæsar, with his usual quick and clear perception, did not overlook the sort of domestic diplomacy carried on, through the instrumentality of the women of the Julian family:* but turning his observation to profit, made

* Julius Cæsar forced his daughter Julia, so celebrated for her beauty and her virtue, to divorce her husband Cornelius Cæpio, and united her to Pompey, for purposes purely political. As long as she lived, the hos-

the beauty, accomplishments, and extreme popularity of his sister Octavia, subservient to his designs on the supreme power in the state.

All Rome testified its admiration of the virtues of Octavia, and applauded the choice of her brother, when he proposed her to Mark Antony, as the successor of the unfortunate Fulvia. Worn out with civil war, which was perpetuated by a succession of factious rivals, the people looked up to Octavia as the one tie capable of consolidating the interests and views of the jarring triumvirate,—as the sacred pledge of public tranquillity. But Octavius, in forwarding this ill-assorted alliance, had a far different design. He knew Mark Antony; and, in his voluptuous colleague's future neglect and abandonment of his faultless and popular sister, he anticipated a cause of final rupture, which would justify his resentment with the public, and rouse their feelings on his behalf.

Antony, as the slave of Cleopatra, soon realized these anticipations; and, that no insult might be spared which could rouse popular indignation, the wily brother sent Octavia after her faithless husband, when on a march against the Bactrians, to solicit a return of those affections which he well knew she had never possessed. Antony fell into the snare; and, instead of welcoming his wife, despatched a command for her instant return, flying himself to Egypt, to calm the jealousies of Cleopatra, who dreaded the innocence and charms of the sister, more than the arms and anger of the powerful brother.

Octavia, on her return from this inauspicious journey, endeavoured to avert the affected wrath of her brother, and to spare the people the calamities of a new rupture. But the policy of Octavius was not to be moved; and the people, who saw in Octavia a successor of the great Roman matrons of the republic, who beheld in the mother of Marcellus another Cornelia, felt her slights as their

tile feelings of the great rivals were kept in check; and her early death was the signal for a civil war, which broke down all ties of amity between the father and son-in-law, and again let loose the evils of faction.

own. Octavius profited by the circumstance; the torch of war was again lighted, the Roman armies again met in civil conflict; the wrongs of the outraged wife were amply avenged in the field of Actium, and the gentlest of women gave to the most absolute of men the mastery of the world.

Octavius, having destroyed his two unworthy colleagues, and played his farce of a public resignation of a temporary command, was persuaded by his complaisant audience to place himself at the head of the Roman government, with the title of Imperator,—a title till then importing merely a military command; but thenceforth a sound signifying power in its greatest, worst, and most irresponsible extent. Under the spell of this awful title, the Tiberiuses, Caligulas, the Neroes, and the Domitians, of ancient and of modern times, have triumphed over the rights, liberties, and happiness of mankind; and the same title, (first conferred under the acclamations of sanguinary legions and of debased senators, nearly two thousand years back, in the Roman forum,) may still command the paid "*vivats*" of living soldiers and senators: but in the icy solitudes of Siberia, in the sunless mines of Poland, in the dreary dungeons of Spielberg, curses "deep not loud" are the response of broken hearts to that sound, which gives to one human being the power of trampling upon millions.

Octavius Cæsar, the chief magistrate of Rome, with the qualification of Imperator, and the personal epithet of Augustus, united also in himself the dignities of Chief Pontiff and of Censor. By thus seizing the management of the established religion, and the legal power of interfering with the conduct and fortunes of every member of the Roman community, he completed that perfect fabric of despotism, which the potentates of modern Europe have, at various epochs, unsuccessfully striven to imitate. But, with the manners of oriental courts for his example and his excuse, Augustus took upon himself no state, and assumed not any of the ostentatious insignia of sovereign power. The court of Augustus, and of the first series of his successors, "corresponded with the forms of the admi-

nistration. The emperors, if we except those tyrants, whose capricious folly violated every law of nature and of decency, disdained that pomp and ceremony, which might offend their countrymen, but could add nothing to their real power. In all the offices of life, they affected to confound themselves with their subjects, and maintained with them an equal intercourse of visits and entertainments. Their habit, their palace, their table, were suited only to the rank of an opulent senator; and their family, however numerous and splendid, was composed entirely of their domestic slaves and freedmen. "The deification of the emperor," says Gibbon, "is the only instance in which they departed from their accustomed prudence and modesty. The Asiatic Greeks were the first inventors, the successors of Alexander the first objects of this servile and impious mode of adulation."*

But though the exterior forms of society remained unchanged, its domestic virtues had melted away with the respect for domestic duties. A new distribution of public power opened a new sphere in society, and created a distinction of classes and families, even among the patricians, which had the worst effects on the women of the imperial regime. It conferred on them an undue personal influence, it placed at their disposal enormous wealth, it released them from the preoccupying duties of private life, and it crushed those ennobling affections, which had hitherto been so productive of a disinterested devotedness. The women of the Julian family, with few, but splendid exceptions, bore no resemblance to the mothers of the Scipios and the Gracchi; and, under the reign of the twelve Cæsars, the false and selfish wives and ambitious mothers of men brutified by egotism, and maddened by power, reacted upon their masters with all the violence, of which, in the first instance, they were themselves the victims.

Augustus, who had done more towards undermining female virtue by his calculating policy, than his predeces-

* Gibbon, vol. i. p. 111.

sor had effected by his personal profligacy, was the victim of his own machinations against the sex; and, in the days of his supreme power, he was as wretched in his domestic life, as he was great and fortunate in his public career. He had been twice married: his first wife, Scribonia, having served the purposes of a temporary policy, was repudiated on the day which gave birth to the fatal and ill-fated Julia, who avenged her mother's wrongs by the ignominy she brought on her father's name. The inspiration of Ovid, the destiny of the younger Antony, and the retributive punishment of Augustus, Julia, the beautiful, the graceful, the gifted, and the frail, withered in exile, and died a dreadful death—a martyr to that social demoralization, which had been brought on by the proscriptions and wars of the ambitious aristocracy to which she belonged.

Scribonia was repudiated to make way for the magnificent Livia Drusilla, the wife of Tiberius Nero, (ominous names,) and the mother of the Emperor Tiberius. Livia, the *maxima fœmina* of Seneca, whom Augustus tore from her husband, was the only woman who awakened an affection, which almost belonged to virtue, in his passionless heart. She seemed designed by nature and by education to be his friend, his counsellor, and his wife. He first saw her when she was flying from the perils brought on her by her husband's devotion to the cause of Antony; and the passion her excited beauty then inspired, seems to have been the only one that overcame the habitual prudence and constitutional coldness of Octavius: it mastered even his ambition, and ended only with his life.

From the moment of his marriage with this adroit and clever woman, he trusted her with his most secret designs, sharing with her his power and his honours. If the sacrifice of private feeling to public good be an evidence of superior intellect, the mind of Livia must have been cast in a great mould. Like her gentler sister-in-law, Octavia, she lost her eldest son, Drusus, the destined successor to the empire, the great captain of his age, who had planted the Roman eagles where the name of Rome had, till then, scarcely been known; but, unlike Octavia, she refused

herself that "luxury of wo," which is oftener the token of a selfish weakness, than an evidence of sensibility.

Stunned, but not vanquished by a blow, fatal alike to her ambition and her motherly love, she wound up all her faculties to meet the shock, and to avert its consequences from Augustus and from Rome.* Sending for Arcus, (a Greek philosopher, then living in the court of Augustus,) she took his advice, rather than asked such cold and pedantic consolation as Seneca puts into his mouth on the occasion; for she stifled her own grief, to cheer the spirits and revive the hopes of Cæsar and of Rome, by pointing out a successor to Drusus, in the person of her second son, Tiberius, who then gave every promise of being worthy to represent him: still, Tiberius was the necessity of her despair, not the election of her affections.

The conspiracy of Cinna afforded another occasion for exhibiting the discretion and long-sighted wisdom of Livia: for to her advice may be attributed the act of sagacious clemency, which contradicted all the antecedents of Augustus. It was not in the nature of the subtle tyrant to pardon the enemy of that supremacy which it had cost him so much to establish, the disturber of that peace which was the object and the ornament of its exercise. His moderation, (the inspiration of his habitual caution,) was balanced by the more urgent fears, awakened by a conspiracy so unexpected, and by the threatened renewal of civil war; and he became a prey to a harassing indecision, which alternately condemned the young conspirator to death, and pleaded for the life of the grandson of Pompey. Of these struggles Livia was the sole witness; and when, in a paroxysm of concentrated rage, Augustus was on the point of again committing himself with posterity, by doing that which was a fault as well as a crime, Livia is said to have interposed her irresistible eloquence and habitual influence, and to have guided the hand, which had

* Seneca holds her forth as a splendid example of fortitude and regulated sensibility, in his consolatory epistle to Marcia, (the daughter of Cordus Cremutius,) who, with Octavia, wept unceasingly the death of a beloved and favourite son, to the neglect of all her other ties and duties.

sanctioned the proscription of Cicero, to sign the pardon of Cinna.

The respect and deference of Augustus for Livia, terminated only with his life. At her request, he accompanied Tiberius on the outset of his journey to Illyria, though labouring at the time under so severe an illness, that, on his return, he died at Nola. In his last moments, as he lay on his couch, supported by his wife, he desired to have a mirror; and, as he gazed on it for a moment, the splendid phantoms of his great deeds seemed to pass before his mind: he called on his surrounding train to applaud him for the part he had played—the last gleam of vainglorious ambition, the last tribute to human weakness. But there was a yet deeper feeling present in that moment of nature's final triumph over all factitious interests. Turning his eyes upon Livia, he drew her, in the grasp of death, still closer to him; and exclaiming, "Livia, be happy, and remember how we have loved," the monarch of the world died like a hero of romance.

CHAPTER III.

The Women of the Empire. Plancina. The first Agrippina.

WHATEVER were the faults of Livia, they appear to have mainly emanated from an intense maternal instinct. Ill-directed by circumstances, and by ambition, the master passion of the age, she suffered that most acute of all penalties under which the human heart can break—maternal disappointment: for the mother of Tiberius was eminently and fearfully taught to feel—

> "How much sharper than a serpent's tooth
> Is an ungrateful child."

The son, pupil, and *protégé* of Livia, gave at first the happy promise of a benevolent reign, by an immediate acknowledgment that he owed his power to his mother, and by the prospective advantages he might derive from her experience.* Livia still held a place near the person of her imperial son, retained an influence over his actions, a voice in his councils; and while she continued to do so, the wisdom, policy, and liberality of his government were conspicuous. It was during this brief interval of sanity in the life of a maniac or a monster, that the Roman people, among other blessings, enjoyed a liberty, analogous to the free press of modern times—freedom of speech, the unrestrained expression of public opinion; "for, in a free city, (said the dissimulating expositor of his mother's wisdom,) in a free city, the tongue of every man should be free." Taxes, too, were gradually lessened, and luxury restrained by salutary regulations. At home all was peace; abroad all was victory: Germanicus conquered the barbarians of the north, and Tiberius won the hearts of the Romans.

Power, however, parasites, pleasure, and the outburst of passions, long checked but inherent, soon broke the restraints which early habits and education had imposed; and neither Rome nor Livia were long permitted to enjoy the illusion of this seeming virtue and borrowed wisdom. The control of the mother's more powerful mind soon became offensive and insupportable to the son; and, when she was removed from the councils of Tiberius, and banished from his society, her authority over him gave way to that of Plancina, his beautiful and artful mistress, and wife of the absent Piso, governor of Syria.

Plancina, either early perverted, or pre-eminently organized for evil, became the very soul of that faction which aimed at the ruin of Germanicus; and she executed the delicate mission of calumny against the most illustrious character of the age, with an address which gained for

* Tiberius (*crammed* probably by his mother and his tutor) pronounced a funeral oration over his father at nine years old. He also obtained a triumph in his early youth by his military exploits.

her the exclusive confidence of Tiberius. When at length, the emperor had determined on the death of his too formidable kinsman, it was to her that he entrusted the conveyance of his secret orders to Piso, her husband, for the administration of poison! and her courage and dexterity in undertaking the perilous mission are evidences of the intellectual superiority of the bad woman, over the imperial tyrant, of whose devices she was probably the instigator, not less than the agent.

Opposed to Plancina, in the history of Rome's worst times, stands forward a woman, whose life and character were illustrations of all that is brightest in humanity,—Agrippina, the widow of the murdered Germanicus, and grandaughter of Augustus Cæsar. Agrippina united to the beauty of Julia, (her unfortunate mother,) the firmness of purpose which distinguished her illustrious father; and she nobly maintained the glory of her descent, which her brothers and sisters had so deeply dishonoured. Proud of the blood of Augustus flowing in her veins, she aimed at representing his political wisdom.

In her devotion to her husband, Germanicus, she accompanied him in his arduous campaigns, sharing alike his dangers and his triumphs, and giving birth to her beautiful children amidst the unaccomodated vicissitudes of a camp. She thus rendered herself adored by the soldiery, and so respected by their officers, that, in the temporary absences of Germanicus, they consulted and obeyed her, as if the spirit and skill of the Cæsars were her natural inheritance.

Tacitus relates that, the army being stationed along the bank of the Rhine, news was brought that four legions, under Cecina, were pressed by the barbarians, and in imminent danger. Germanicus, at the time, being absent with another body of the army, the destruction of the bridge over the Rhine was proposed in a moment of despair and confusion, as a measure of necessary security; but Agrippina, taking upon herself the functions and responsibility of a general, resolutely opposed the measure, awaited the retreating legions at the head of the bridge, praised

their valour, thanked them for their services, supplied cloths and bandages for the wounded, and thus prevented a great catastrophe.*

This incident sank deep into the mind of Tiberius, as indicating a profound policy, and an ill-concealed ambition. He complained "that Agrippina was more influential with the troops than their proper commanders; that a woman had put down a sedition, when the name of the emperor was powerless;" that "she habited her son affectedly in the guise of a simple soldier, while she taught the legions to hail him Cæsar." These impressions were never effaced; and Germanicus, in the midst of his successes and his glory, was suddenly struck down by poison, and died in the arms of Agrippina. Having given to nature and to grief their awful tribute, the illustrious widow prepared for vengeance, and commenced her voyage to Italy with her husband's precious remains, her children, and a part of the army, in a procession, which, in pomp and circumstance, resembled a triumph rather than a funeral ceremony.

All Rome was still in the first stupor of astonishment and grief at the sudden and mysterious death of Germanicus, (who had attained only to the prime of life, and was of a robust temperament,) when Agrippina, and her mourning train, appeared at its gates. She bore in her arms the urn which contained his honoured ashes, she was surrounded by his beautiful children, and followed by the veteran legions who had fought and conquered under his command. Thus accompanied, she had traversed the empire, from Syria through Italy. The Roman people received her, clad in mourning, and bathed in tears; and, by the light of a thousand torches, and in the presence of millions, Agrippina deposited the remains of her husband by the side of those of the deified Augustus.

This great duty paid, a still greater remained to be accomplished; that of demanding justice for Germanicus,

* Ac ni Agrippina impositum Rheno pontem solvi prohibuisset, erunt qui id flagitium formidine auderent. Sed femina ingens animi munia ducis per eos dies induit, &c.—*Annalium*, l. i. § lxix.

and the punishment of his murderer. Tiberius, terrified by the popularity of Agrippina, remained within the mysterious recesses of his palace; he sent, however, his officers to compliment her with the title of "The glory of the Roman matrons;" and granted her request of a trial, which could not be refused without exciting suspicions against himself.

Agrippina appeared before the senate, and courageously and eloquently pleading her cause, astounded her audience by accusing Piso, the favourite and confidant of Tiberius, and the husband of Plancina, of the murder of Germanicus. The conscript fathers heard her and were silent: but their silence was the sentence of Piso; and, the morning after his accusation, he was found dead on his couch. His death was attributed to the secret orders of Tiberius, issued in probable anticipation of the revelations of his despairing agent.

Agrippina had been the early and only love of Germanicus, had shared his pursuits in the study, as well as his perils in the field. Her children had been reared amidst the din of war; and her spirit, at once intellectual and martial, may have induced her husband, as he lay dying in her arms, and with the poison of Tiberius circulating in his veins, to caution her against that unbending haughtiness, (the besetting sin of her character,) which, however becoming in the grandaughter of Augustus, might be fatal to the widow of Germanicus, and to the children whom he bequeathed to her sole guardianship and love. But the spirit which, in the impetuous mind of woman, springs from a sense of right, is rarely to be controlled by the cold dictates of expediency. In the imperial circle, and in the presence of Tiberius, Agrippina conducted herself with the same lofty and uncompromising dignity, as at the head of the Roman army, and before the Roman senate.

The increasing love of the people for the family of Germanicus, and their reverence for Agrippina, openly expressed whenever she appeared in public, confirmed the apprehensions excited in the emperor by this high and

unflinching bearing. His first attack upon her, (the greatest injury which tyranny could inflict on a mother,) was her separation from her children; his next was her banishment to a desolate island; and his last and least, sentence of death. Its manner was slow and torturing to the fullest extent of ingenious cruelty,*—starvation; the vilest outrage on the most faultless of the women of antiquity, dictated by the meanest jealousy of the worst of their masters.†

The atrocious conduct of Tiberius towards the widow of Germanicus was followed by his more unnatural cruelty to Livia, the author of his life, and of all its greatness, whom he abandoned to neglect and desolation, and to all the unalleviated infirmities of extreme old age. On her death, he broke her will, as carelessly as he had broken her heart; he persecuted, or put to death the few friends adversity had left her, and forbade the senate to render to her memory those honours, which that servile body had decreed to the widow of Augustus. Frankly avowing his envy of Priam, who had survived all his kindred, he continued to sacrifice to his cruelty, to his avarice, and to his fears, friends, relations, and the opulent of all classes; so that in Rome there was not one family, which might not reproach him for the loss of a father, a husband, a brother, or a son.

To this Augustan age of crime, for ever memorable in the fasti of human wickedness and weakness, is referable that sacrifice, which, however propitiatory and predestined in a spiritual sense, well belonged, as a human fact, to the iniquity of this dark epoch.‡

* Tacitus gives this only as a supposition; but it is to be observed that Tiberius had already condemned his exiled wife, the unfortunate Julia, the daughter of Augustus, to the same death.

† "After the virtuous and unfortunate widow of Germanicus had been put to death, Tiberius received the thanks of the senate for *his clemency*, because she had not been publicly strangled, nor her body drawn with a hook to the Gemoniæ, where those of common malefactors were exposed."—*Tacit. Ann.* l. vi. § 25.

‡ "Tertullien en racontant cet evenement, dit que Pilate, étonné des prodiges qui suivirent la mort du Sauveur, en rendit compte à Tibère; et

CHAPTER IV.

The Women of Rome under the Empire continued.

TIBERIUS having oppressed the world for twenty-two years, was murdered in the midst of his disgusting vices, by the favourite he had chosen for his successor,—"a serpent," (as he himself said,) "whom he had reared for the Roman people, a Phaeton for the world!" The people, when they learned his decease, became frantic with joy; and heedless of the future, in the joy of a momentary liberation, gave free vent to their feelings: but the senate, whose slavish habits the tyrant's death could not disturb, preserved unbroken their hypocrisy; and gave to him who was unworthy to be accounted a man, a place among the gods.

Among the untranscribable vices and crimes of the Emperor Caligula, the most fatal, if not the most extravagant, were directed against the morals and the happiness of woman; and from the attempts of his brute passions and tyrannical power, even the females of his own family were not exempted.

The unworthy son of Germanicus, (so early torn from the arms of his illustrious mother, to be reared in the vicious court of his father's murderer, among slaves and parasites, and the enemies of his house,) started, like his predecessor, with qualities which recalled his noble origin, and seemed to justify the hopes held out by a precocious genius, and promised virtues. But the illusion (if it indeed existed) was but short-lived; and when he raised a

que ce prince ayant proposé au Senat de mettre Jesus au raug des Dieux, ce corps s'y opposa: il ajoute que l'empereur menaca de mort tous ceux qui accuseraient les chrétiens. Mais Tertullien est le seul historien qui rapporte ce fait. La religion n'a pas besoin de fables pour se defendre, et Tibère était le prince le moins digne de connaitre et de protéger un culte si moral."—*Ségur, Hist. Universel.*

courtezan to the throne of the empire, and placed her in the college of the priesthood, when he made his horse a consul, built a temple to himself, and deified the power of Jupiter, when he fed his wild beasts with human victims, and studded the manger of his charger with precious stones, when he avowed his wish "that the Romans had but one head, that he might destroy all at a single blow," and attempted their destruction by famine, through his monopoly of corn,—it became but too evident that the master of mankind was mad.

Yet, among the many victims of his insane caprices, not one, during his three years' reign, dared offer opposition to his frantic career, save only an aged woman. His grandmother, Antonia, the still surviving mother of Germanicus, whose long widowhood had been devoted to the education of her noble son and his less worthy brothers, alone remonstrated with Caligula, and reproved, if she could not reform, his monstrous vices. "Fear you not the gods?" she asked, "fear you not the laws?" "The laws," replied Caligula; "my will alone is law;" and the death of Antonia, which followed quickly on the interview, was a scarcely noticed confirmation of the fact.

Caligula died by assassination, the natural death of a reckless despot,—the common "temperament" of irresponsible power in all ages. His successor, the stupid, sensual, and cruel Claudius, was well calculated to perpetuate the combination. This promising pupil of Titus Livius, the historian, was dragged from under a bed (where he had concealed himself during the commotion of Caligula's death) to assume the throne.

The grandson and ward of Livia, he for a while upheld the popular prejudice in his favour, by the exhibition of some false lights of intellect and humanity, the fading rays of an artificial but unavailing education. He soon, however, gave up the struggle between nature and precept; and, incapable of exercising the power forced on him by the accident of birth, and after many proofs of uncontrollable voluptuousness, and of hopeless imbecility, he permitted the reins of government to fall into the hands of the

woman, whom his freedmen and parasites had chosen for his wife,—that woman whose name shame might be ashamed to write, did not historic truth demand the record,—the infamous Messalina Valeria.

When the depravity of man placed this worst of women in the highest station, and gave her power over the lives of myriads, there were still in the capital of the world women of unblemished virtue, of great genius, and of high acquirements,—women, who, like the sisters of Claudius himself, were conspicuous for talent, beauty, and conduct. Among these was Poppæa, the wife of the senator Scipio, whose popularity exposed her to the envy of the abandoned Empress, and who expiated her superiority with her life. But such women were ill placed in those times; and, like the jarring elements of ill-assorted natural combinations, they appeared, only to be eliminated.

Messalina, dissolute and frivolous, as she is described, succeeded in possessing herself of that political power, which the imbecile Claudius had consigned to slaves and freedmen; and she became for a time the presiding destiny of Rome.

Narcissus, the freedman and secretary of Claudius, (who, availing himself of the infirmities of his besotted master, had abused his trust, to plunder the citizens of Rome; and who, to enrich himself, put many of its distinguished men to death, in the name of the Emperor, if not with his knowledge,) had awakened the fears of Messalina. Jealous of his power, if not indignant at crimes which might be attributed to herself, she resolved on removing him from the counsels and presence of Claudius. But Narcissus, who had favoured her mad follies, and encouraged her vices, beheld her encroachments of political power with apprehension, and her intrigues against himself with a thirst for revenge. He resolved therefore on her sacrifice; and Messalina soon presented him a favourable opportunity.

The unworthy daughter of the patrician, Messala Barbatus, and of the stoical and high-minded Lepida, was by nature but a foolish, feeble, and frivolous creature, the early

victim of vanity, and uncontrolled passion. Power, which made her cruel, seems also to have made her mad. The last act of her vicious and degraded life was marked by characteristics of the age, and by traits which place the romance of history far beyond the boldest combinations of fictitious narrative.

Augustus, Tiberius, and Caligula, had broken through all the restraints of marriage, that holiest law, so sacred to the ancient Romans, the germ of all that was great and good in their lives and polity. They had all forced wives from their husbands, on the spur of passion or of expediency; but Messalina added a new feature of extravagance and of guilt to this abandoned violence, in taking another woman's husband, in the lifetime and with the consent of her own. She not only caused Caius Silius to repudiate his own lovely and virtuous wife; (cited as the model woman of her day,) but, (as it has been said,) brought over the infatuated Claudius to sign the marriage contract.* Tacitus observes that this event would have been regarded as a fable, if all Rome had not witnessed it.

Having sent Claudius to Ostia, she proceeded with her doomed bridegroom to one of those beautiful villas which her taste and extravagance had multiplied in the Campania; and accompanied by a courtly train of the youth of both sexes, distinguished for their rank and their beauty. Amidst the luxuriant imagery of an Italian vintage, in scenes of sylvan beauty and of imperial magnificence, the mythological drama of the union of Bacchus and Ariadne was represented, in all its poetry, and in all its licentiousness. The ivy and vine-crowned Silius was still quaffing the Circe cup of pleasure, sharing the homage and the shame of the imperial Ariadne, when the tramp of soldiers disturbed the music of the fête. The grim apparition of

* The Emperor's strange conduct on this occasion is explained, as having been founded in a superstitious motive. "Ex quibusdum portentis, harioli prædixerunt periculum imminere imperatori: quod ut Claudius propulsaret, in alterumque transferret, permisit ut Messalina nuberet Silio, ut ita in Silium, tanquam in imperatorem, periculum ipsi imminens, transferretur."—*Sueton.* Edit. Lugd. Bat. 1651, p. 528, Note 2.

the Prætorian guard suddenly put to flight the sporting fauns and laughing nymphs; and even Ariadne scarcely escaped the iron clutch of armed power, while Silius was seized and borne away to death.

Messalina, abandoned by all, proceeded on foot to Rome. None ventured to offer a chariot to her, who had been so lately the destiny of all. Weary and worn, she at length obtained from a peasant permission to place herself in his cart; and thus the transient mistress of the world returned to the gates of its capital, which she had so lately left in all the sovereignty of power and of pleasure. Claudius had been roused for an instant from his sleep of shame by his parasite ministers; but Messalina, counting on the fondness of a fool, (that frailest of all reliances) still believed in the potency of her charms and caresses, and resolved to plead her own cause before him.

The difficulty of obtaining admission to the imperial presence induced her to seek the protection and company of one, against whose sacred footsteps no gates were ever closed,—the high priestess of the vestals, the spotless and venerable Vibadia. Accompanied by this holy woman, and by her own two beautiful children, Britannicus and Octavia, (a fine trait of nature, or of cunning) vice, supported by innocence and virtue, sought the tribunal of power and fatuity. When this graphic and singular group stood before the gates of the palace, and demanded entrance, the officers of the guard refused a passage to Messalina and her children; but Vibadia asked no leave, and passed on unaccompanied to the presence of Claudius.

Whatever may have been the motive of the charitable vestal, she pleaded for the life of the culprit with a dignity and an eloquence worthy of a better subject. She is said to have accused the indulgence and weakness of Claudius as the causes of his wife's vices, and to have asked her life for the sake of his children. Claudius, prompted by the still powerful Narcissus, (whose vengeance was now so near its accomplishment) heard Vibadia with respect, and dismissed her with a promise that, at her request, he would hear the criminal and the wretched empress in her

own defence, at some future moment. The feeble Claudius was often heard to say:—"When will this ungrateful Messalina come?" forgetful that he had already commanded her execution.

When the tribune, sent with a military force, by Narcissus, in the name of the emperor, to inflict the sentence, sought the condemned empress in the Gardens of Lucullus, (those beautiful gardens which she had purchased with the blood of Valerius Asiaticus, and of the innocent and heroic Poppæa) he found Messalina, on whose brows the vine-crowned diadem of Ariadne could have scarcely faded, prostrate on the earth, pale, haggard, and dishevelled. Beside her sat her mother, Lepida, earnest and calm, performing with the sternness of her philosophical creed, the last duties of a parent. "She could not," she said, "teach her daughter how to live; she had come to teach her how to die!"

When the soldier approached, Messalina, conscious of his fearful mission, shuddered and wept. Lepida, placing a sword in her hand, commanded her to dry her tears, and to save herself the ignominy of a criminal's fate, by dying like a Roman empress. Messalina took the sword, and placed the point against her bosom; but her courage failed. She had not the moral force necessary to obey her stoic mother: and the soldier whose weapon she held, in cruelty or in compassion, pressed the hand of the wretched woman in his own, and plunged the sword to her heart. Messalina was no more; but all the circumstances, the institutions, and the men which conferred upon her a short-lived and fatal pre-eminence, were still left in unabated force and pernicious activity.

Messalina has continued from her own days to the present, a favourite theme of misogynist satirists; and of all recorded women, she lies under the most odious imputations, to justify their thesis. The imagination, indeed, recoils from an implicit credence in such disgusting details; and, for the dignity of human nature, seeks a ground for disbelief in the exaggerations of poetry, and the courtier-like malice of gossiping contemporaries. But no historic

doubts can redeem the name of Messalina from its proverbial application; and since, even to save the honour of womanhood, that name cannot be blotted from the historic page, justice and the best interests of the species require, that the actions it recalls should be traced to their true causes, and that a higher moral should be drawn from its citation, than can be attained by general inferences from the individual to the sex.

In the more striking cases of human misconduct there are, for the most part, two parties—the criminals who offend, and the society which first prepares the act, and then passively acquiesces in it. If such, therefore, was Messalina, must we not ask what was the age in which her excesses were possible? what the average morality of the men who had brought society to such a condition? If the women of Suetonius and of Juvenal were degraded, the seeds of their vices sprang from the murders, the confiscations, and the violence, which attended the overthrow of the republic. Long protracted anarchy had obliterated almost every trace of virtue in the patricians of Rome. Dissolute, cowardly, and slavish, beyond the ignominy of oriental despotism, the men of the empire were themselves guilty of every crime and meanness. They set the tone of manners, they afforded to the women the examples and the encouragements of sin; and, having lost that fine moral sense, which places the honour of the husband in the wife's keeping, they had lost the right of controlling female conduct, or reproaching female delinquency.

The death of Messalina was announced to the emperor while he was at dinner—the death of that Messalina, for whose return he still sighed, and whose absence he still dwelt on with the reiterated reproachful question:—"Will she never come?" Claudius, however, received the news without emotion, and continued to eat; not suffering an event so full of horror to disturb his repast, or to derange his digestion.

The besotted emperor, always gorged or drunk, was but the puppet of his freedmen and slaves, who laughed at his stupidity, indulged his vices, availed themselves of his

crimes, and governed in his name. The influence which his parasites had obtained through the dissolute Messalina, and the facility with which Narcissus got rid of her when she became troublesome, taught them the necessity of giving her a successor; and they chose one whose imperial descent seemed calculated to cover her subserviency to their rule. In fixing upon Julia Agrippina, the emperor's niece, to be his wife, they violated every sense of decency; and their utter ignorance of the character and genius of the woman whose ambitious views they forwarded, was no less conspicuous in the choice, than the obtusity of their moral sense.

There is still extant a contemporary portrait of Claudius, sketched by the hand of a great master, which has preserved for posterity such minute and striking traits of the man and of the times, as chronicles seldom retain, and the remote historian still more rarely condescends to adopt. The Apocoloquintosis of Seneca is one of the most humorous burlesques which the wit of antiquity has produced. It opens with the supposed arrival of Claudius in the other world, (he having died of an indigestion) to claim the family honours of adscription into "the quiet order of the gods."* He is ushered into the presence of the assembled deities, and announced to Jupiter, as a *quidam*, a creature of extraordinary and bloated size, with white hair, and a shaking head, dragging his right foot after him, and muttering only confused and incoherent sounds. When asked "whence he came," he answers "he does not know," in a pronunciation so inarticulate, as to be quite incomprehensible; being neither Latin, Greek, nor any other known tongue. Jupiter, completely puzzled, calls upon Hercules, as a great traveller, one skilled in the dialects of all nations, to interpret. But Hercules, upon looking into "the creature's" face, de-

* The title of the tract *Apocoloquintosis*, is a parody upon the technical term for this process, Apotheosis. The Apo-pumpkinosis (for so the word may be translated) is a mere passing joke, and enters for nothing into the satire itself. It was written five years after the marriage of Agrippina.

clares it a monster, and, (by its tottering movements and snorting respiration,) a product of the sea: and he trembles lest he should be assigned a new labour, more formidable than all the other twelve.

The disgusting ghost is, however, at length recognised as the Emperor Claudius; and Jupiter, addressing the "conscript fathers" of Olympus to collect their opinion concerning his apotheosis, declares him to be quite as deserving of that honour as many of his predecessors,—being at least of the blood of the divine Augustus and Augusta.

At the ill-timed jest of the facetious thunderer, the deified Augustus is brought upon his legs to address the assembly, and protest against the inference. "Conscript fathers," he exclaims, "I call on you to witness that I have never yet troubled you with a speech, or meddled in your affairs; but grief and shame must have vent, and I cannot now sit by in silence. Was it for this that I put an end to civil bloodshed, and gave peace to the world? Was it for this that I reconstituted Rome by my laws, and ornamented it with my works? I want words to express my indignation. Here is a wretch, without the courage to drive away a fly, who has yet dared to slay men as lightly as he would fling the dice. What shall I say of his infinite perversions of justice, or how find leisure to bewail the public calamities, oppressed as I am by the miseries he has brought on my own family!

"This creature, who so long had thriven beneath the lustre of my name, how has he shown his gratitude? By murdering the two Julias, my nieces, the one by the sword, and the other by starvation, and by killing my grandson Silanus. Oh, Jupiter, take good care lest, by making this wretch a god, you adopt his crimes as your own! But, tell me, oh divine Claudius, how had you the confidence to condemn so many victims, without even the form of a trial, or of a simple hearing? Was this your custom in Rome? if so, it certainly is not ours in heaven. Jupiter in his long reign never injured any one, except, indeed, when he broke Vulcan's leg; and if in his passion he

once hung up his wife in the heavens, he did not kill her, as you murdered Messalina, my grand-niece.

"How say you? you do not know! may the gods confound you! this ignorance is worse than the murder itself. And is this wretch to become a god? Look at him, a creature made in spite! If he can speak only three plain words consecutively, I'm content to be his slave; and yet he forsooth must be a god! Who, think you, will worship him? who believe in him? or who do you imagine will acknowledge hereafter your own divinities, if such are to be the specimens of your manufacture?"

Opposed to this personal sketch of one of the world's mighty masters by the stylus of wit and of truth, there exists a contemporary portrait, taken also from the life, of another individual, on the more tangible forms of which posterity still gazes with an intense unfading admiration. It is a statue, combining an expression of moral dignity and of intellectual force, with as much physical beauty and poetical grace, as the genius of sculpture ever borrowed from breathing nature, to work out its own miracles of art. This statue—a history and an epic in itself—represents a woman in the prime of middle life, seated in a chair of state, and in the deep repose of meditative thought. Her stature is lofty, her brow of high capacity, her mouth expressive of love and wit, and all her features are harmonized by that regularity, which is ever denied to defective organizations. Over the whole of this simply-draped and noble figure, there is an air of tranquil majesty, which, in its solemn influence, likens it to the statues of the gods. It is the resemblance of one who received from her son the glorious title of "the best of mothers,"—of Agrippina, such as she was, when chosen to be the wife of Claudius.

Julia Agrippina, the great-granddaughter of Augustus, the daughter of Germanicus, was born amidst the exciting circumstances of war, in a Roman camp, on the shores of the Rhine; and she was reared under the laurels of her father's conquests, and under the halo of her mother's grandeur. The first incident in her youthful existence

was her father's obsequies; and her first perception of the career, which birth and genius opened to her, might have been derived from the acclamations of sympathy and respect, accorded by the Roman people to her family, even in the presence of her father's murderers.

Her early estrangement from her glorious mother, by the banishment and horrid death of the widow of Germanicus, was followed by the persecution of her brothers, her sisters, and herself, by the infamous Sejanus. The early death of the high-minded Domitius, the husband of her youth, and the father of her only child, exposed her first to the fatal preference, and then to the hate and vengeance of her brother Caligula. He accused her of a participation in the conspiracy of Lentulus, before the senate, whom he forced to condemn her. Driven into a long exile in a desolate island, her son was torn from her arms, and committed for education to the care of a rope-dancer, and the keeper of baths. The constant dread of a violent death, the persecution and exile of Seneca, Burrhus, and others of the bravest and wisest of her friends, were fearful antecedents; and, to a mind of such power and intensity, they must have proved fostering elements of that spirit of vengeance, which might well have "filled her from top to toe with direst cruelty,"—such as some historians have attributed to her, though none have substantiated the facts on which they have relied.

On the death of Caligula, Agrippina, recalled from exile, was married to the Consul Crispinus, whose sudden death was (according to the notions of the times) ascribed to poison, administered, as her enemies asserted, by his wife. Five years after this event, Pallas, the favourite of Claudius, and the rival of Narcissus, struck by the genius of Agrippina, aware of her apprehensions of Narcissus, and won, perhaps, by her beauty and her arts, proposed her to Claudius as the successor of Messalina.

The obstacle opposed to this marriage by the ties of consanguinity, was relieved by a special law, an innovation in the jurisprudence of Rome; and, after the perilous interval of a year, during which Agrippina had to contend

with the intrigues of Narcissus, the rivalry of Lollia Paulina, and that of Calphurnia, the daughter of Germanicus ascended the throne of Augustus.

Seizing the reins of government in her vigorous grasp, from that moment she ruled the empire, in the name of her imbecile husband, in a spirit of reform, that seemed an anticipation of modern institutes. Her brilliant administration opened with vigour: faction was controlled, anarchy gave way to order, and despotism itself was made subservient to retributive justice. She abolished, at once, that organized system of espionage, which, for the purposes of confiscation, had filled Rome with informers and their victims. She re-established order in the finances, and economy in the domestic expenditure of the palace. She gave an example of courtly propriety in the reserve and dignity of her deportment; and the imperial palace, (so long dishonoured by the orgies of Messalina,) became more severe in its manners, and decent in all its exterior forms.

The crimes attributed to Claudius, and committed with his passive assent, seemed to have been suspended from the morning of his marriage. Grave ministers replaced the dissolute minions of a feeble government; the banished genius and worth of Rome were recalled; the brave and popular Burrhus was placed in command of the Prætorian guards; and Seneca, the philosopher, the friend and partisan of the family of Germanicus, was appointed to be the preceptor of Domitius, the long neglected and estranged son of the empress. Salutary laws were enacted, and were executed with inflexible severity; and the abuses which had infected every department, were swept away and abolished.

The administration of Agrippina, in its general character thus vigorous and benevolent, seems to have rendered her obnoxious to much obloquy; and Tacitus, on the authority of contemporary pamphleteers, (in modern parlance) has loaded her memory with the imputation of inordinate ambition, and with the commission of some sanguinary deeds in its gratification. In these charges,

there is, probably, considerable calumny; though the temper of the times, and the character of the imperial government, scarcely allow an utter incredulity as to all the facts. In those days, greatness and goodness were not twin sisters: and it may be supposed that a temperament like Agrippina's did not shrink from the arbitrary and cruel acts which might be thought necessary to her safety or advancement. Still, the woman must be judged by the circumstances under which she lived, and with reference to the morality of her contemporaries; and, so judged, she rises immeasurably superior to the greatest men associated with her history.

Hitherto the emperors had given to their wives while still living, the name of Augusta, and when dead had placed them with the epithet Diva in the list of the divinities; but they had reserved for themselves all the personal distinctions directly connected with the act of governing.

Agrippina was the first woman who acquired the privilege of entering the capitol in the vehicle assigned to the priests in religious ceremonies, a distinction granting to her a sort of functional importance, a positive place in the hierarchy of constituted authorities. On all public occasions she took an elevated seat, reserved for her close to the tribunal occupied by the emperor; and she was received with the same honours as Claudius himself. It was thus seated, that she accepted the homage of the British captives, and the thanks of Caractacus for the life granted at her intercession,—a singular spectacle to the Roman people, who beheld for the first time a female invested with the pomp of sovereign power.

Agrippina, popular and respected, took no pains to conceal that she considered herself as sharing with Claudius that empire, which the genius and valour of her ancestors had won and consolidated. The year after her marriage, she succeeded in procuring the adoption of her son Domitius, with the style or title of Nero Claudius Cæsar, to the prejudice of the emperor's own child by Messalina, the infant Britannicus. It was on this occasion that she received the imperial cognomen of Augusta, and that to the

prophetic Augur who bade her "beware, lest the son she so elevated might prove her ruin," she replied, "Let me perish, but let Nero reign."

In this answer we have the secret of her great actions, and the motive for all her imputed crimes. Amidst all her lofty aspirations, her indomitable pride, her keen sense of injuries inflicted, her consciousness of power acquired, there was one deep and redeeming affection: this brilliant despot, the astute politician of her age, was still above all, and in all—a mother! To win for Nero the favour of the people, she affected to consider him as a simple citizen, devoted to that antique liberty from which Rome had derived all her ancient glory. To win the senate, she sent the well-taught pupil of the plausible Seneca, to spout his theme, and plead the cause of Troy before their conscript wisdom, in a long pedantic oration, written by his tutor. The rank of the young Roscius of the imperial stage, and the cause he espoused, won all suffrages; the genius and the accomplishments of Nero were extolled to the skies; and Agrippina, so celebrated for her wit and her sarcasm, must have laughed in secret (perhaps with Seneca) at a world, so easily imposed upon, and so lightly won.

The character of the boy, Britannicus, was yet untried, the genius of Nero was already admitted; and, when a marriage between the grandson of Germanicus and the innocent Octavia, (the emperor's daughter,) was accomplished by the empress and her ministers, the hopes and views of Agrippina attained their consummation.

Thus relieved from maternal anxiety, Agrippina gave up her mind to the affairs of state; and the last years of the reign of Claudius were crowned with glory and prosperity. Wise ministers at home, great generals abroad, the people satiated with "bread and games," the army glutted with victories and spoils, the conquest of Mauritania, the successes in Armenia, the subjugation of the British provinces to the very verge of the Irish seas, all alike flattered the vainglory of the Romans, whose national pride had survived all their other public virtues.

The most magnificent naumachia ever exhibited, was

given in celebration of these events, at a cost incredible, when compared with the expenses of modern governments; and was followed by public games and dramatic spectacles without end. Many great public works were likewise commenced, even beyond the confines of Italy; and a colony and a city were founded in Belgic Gaul, on the shores of the Rhine, on the very spot where Agrippina first saw the light, in the arms of her immortal mother. The colony was composed of all that remained of the veteran soldiers of Germanicus and their families; and the noble city, which replaced the straw-thatched huts of the Ubians, took the name of Colonia Agrippina—the Cologne of modern times.

In the midst of these great works, Agrippina found time to write her own memoirs, from which Tacitus acknowledges that he borrowed, in the composition of his history:* but, while her genius and vigour were giving such illustration to the reign of an emperor proverbial for imbecility and indolence, Claudius died!

The simple fact of his death is, that the emperor, notorious for his sensuality and gluttony, sinking under premature old age brought on by excesses, and loaded with the infirmity incidental to intemperance, was taken ill, after supping heartily on a dish of mushrooms; a circumstance so little regarded in his family, (accustomed as they were to witness the effects of his debauchery,) as almost to have escaped the notice of the bystanders. Claudius, either from stupidity or drunkenness, scarcely complained; and when his physician, Xenophon, was induced to apply a feather to the fauces, he used only the common remedy, adopted in cases of simple indigestion.

An event, however, thus natural in all its details, was ascribed to poison;—not indeed by respectable contemporary historians, (one of whom, and the most garrulous,

* Id ego, a scriptoribus annalium non traditum, reperi in commentariis Agrippinæ filiæ, quæ, Neronis Principis mater, vitam suam et casus suorum posteris memoravit.—*Annal.* l. iv. liii. It is singular that Tacitus, having these memoirs to consult, should so often refer to conflicting authorities of a secondary character.

Seneca, was present at the scene,) but by the writers of succeeding reigns. The motive assigned for the treacherous act was found in the fears of Agrippina. Domitia Lepida, the daughter of Drusus, and of Antonia the grandniece of Augustus, (one of the most dissolute women of her age,) had found means to insinuate herself into the confidence of Claudius, and to awaken him to a sense of the power obtained by his wife at his expense: and the emperor was reported to have said, that it was his misfortune first to suffer from the conduct of his wives, and then to have to punish them. Agrippina is accused of having acted on his threat; and is said to have saved her own life by anticipating the natural death of her husband.

To a tale like this, the piercing genius of modern criticism would oppose many objections. It was the interest of Agrippina that Claudius should live. The claims of the young Britannicus to the succession, the uncertain result of education on the character of the artificial Nero, were motives for preserving the emperor's life. Agrippina, possessed of unlimited power, could scarcely be disturbed by the intrigues of a few envious women, or discontented men; while the growing infirmities of her husband seemed to render the crime imputed to her by Tacitus as unnecessary as it was impolitic. The truth is among the secrets of eternity: but, whatever may have been the guilt of Agrippina, it must have been shared by Seneca and by Burrhus; who, though, in their after lives, they proved themselves not above the temptation to crime, were then in the height of their reputation; and they were not driven by abject fear, to forfeit a character for virtue, so painfully acquired,—a forfeiture, unnecessary at that moment, as it must have been odious.

During the perilous interval while Claudius struggled between life and death, the genius of Agrippina came forth in all its vigour and intensity. She took immediate possession of Britannicus and Octavia, covered them with caresses, and promised them protection, mingling her tears with theirs for the approaching loss of a father. She sent away Nero to the army, near Rome, under the con-

duct of Burrhus. Presented by that popular general, and prompted by his mother, Nero harangued the legions in a speech written by Seneca. He promised largesses to the soldiers, introduced the name and exploits of his grandfather, recalling that great man's person by the striking resemblance he bore him. Burrhus seized the moment of excitement thus produced, to propose the young Cæsar as the successor of Claudius; the army adopted him by acclamations, and their echoes were carried on the winds to the ears of the watchful mother.

Then, and not till then, the gates of the palace were thrown open; the death of Claudius was disclosed; and the elevation of Nero by the choice of the army, was made known to the Roman people. The people adopted the election of the Prætorian cohorts; and Agrippina followed up the *coup d'état* by sending Nero to the senate, whom he addressed in another well-conned speech. He pronounced the usual funeral eulogium on the late emperor, enumerating his splendid virtues, (!) and demanding that Claudius should be raised to the rank of the gods. During this oration, Nero alone preserved a dignified gravity; the conscript fathers were convulsed with laughter; but they, nevertheless, decreed the apotheosis of the dullest and most defective of men.

While this farce was performing before the hereditary wisdom of Rome, where was Agrippina? Most probably shut up in measureless content with Seneca, and, with her characteristic humour, and her intimate knowledge of the weakness and ridicules of Claudius, assisting the author of the Apocoloquintosis to pen that witty *brochure*, which so little resembles the other productions of the prosing maxim-monger, that we may almost suppose it owes him little beyond his name.

In all this great historical drama, who was the protagonist? who the manager, and most efficient actor? woman, or her master? Whose was the superior mind? who was the intellectual agent? Was it the wily Seneca? the ductile Burrhus? the sordid army? the servile senate? the impressionable people, or the consistent, concentrated Agrip-

pina, who, actuated by one all-absorbing feeling, in the pursuit of one great object, put them all in motion?—that feeling was maternal love, that object the empire of the world!

Nero was but eighteen when the genius of his mother placed him on the throne of the Cæsars. Although married in boyhood to the daughter of the late emperor, he was still in the hands of those able preceptors, who now became the ministers of his government. Grateful and submissive, he made no effort to wrest the authority from her who was still so willing to exercise it; but gracefully, and, to all appearance, voluntarily, threw back the reins of administration, into those hands which had so long and so firmly held them.

His confidence in Agrippina he expressed in well-turned phrases; and he acted his part as one fully conscious of the great audience before which he was performing. When the officers of the palace-guard first came to him, to ask the password of the watch, he replied, "the best of all mothers." The tender acknowledgment, as it was whispered from post to post, in the midnight silence of the Aventine, must have recalled to many a rude mind the fond reminiscences of early life, mingling the best affections of nature and of infancy, with the stern thoughts and relentless duties of military discipline.

The senate vied with the sovereign in its demonstrations of deference to his august mother. They raised Agrippina to the priesthood, an important item of the supreme authority, an assignment at once of power and respect: they decreed her a guard of honour, and the right of being preceded by two lictors bearing the fasces; the latter testifying that her position was not merely honorary.

The conscript fathers, who had so readily conceded the apotheosis of the dead emperor, soon learned to resist no wish of the living Augusta. In compliance with her will, they removed their sittings to an apartment in the palace, where Agrippina, scarcely concealed by a transparent curtain, was present at their deliberations, and directed their measures.

Claudius had already accustomed the Roman people to behold, in the person of Agrippina, a female taking her place on the imperial tribunal: and Nero, besides continuing that concession, had even followed her litter on foot when she passed beyond the gates of the palace, as a testimony of deference. Under these influences, Seneca, Burrhus, and Pallas, became but the agents of her will; and they readily gave their sanction to her acts of expedient severity, while they assisted to prolong an administration which enabled her to contribute to their enormous wealth, and to uphold their public consideration: for her government, directed, in many instances, to the people's good, readily obtained the people's confidence. Such, indeed, were the repose and the prosperity of the empire under her vigorous and vigilant sway, that Trajan, in after times, was wont to compare the first five years of Nero's reign with those of Rome's best emperors.

Agrippina, in thus drawing to herself the power and the authority of the state, stepped simply into the place which circumstances had assigned her: but, in providing for the exigencies of the moment, she must, from the first, have been distracted with anxieties for a doubtful future.

Under the charm of her able administration, the people might, indeed, have been dazzled by the external varnish, which education had thrown over the character of the emperor, while the senate was edified by the wisdom of the young orator's prepared speeches. But while Seneca eulogized the genius of his pupil, while Burrhus approved, while all Rome applauded, and none possibly remembered the early promises of Tiberius and Caligula, or discovered, under a demeanour so imposing and professions so plausible, the future buffoon of the theatre, the monster-incendiary of Rome—the vigilant eye of motherhood could not have been thus satisfied and deceived. The deep dissimulation with which Nero concealed the nascent vices of his disposition from the public, could not have escaped the keen scrutiny of a mother.

Agrippina must have early discovered that Nero was deficient in that physical sensibility, the source of all high

intellect, of the nobler faculties, and finer sympathies, which distinguish man, and raise him above the tiger and the vulture. This son, so loved in the perversity of maternal instinct, though long estranged from her observation, must have eventually laid bare the inherent egoism and cruelty of his indomitable nature; and of this, the protection and sympathy she lavished on Octavia, the tenderness with which she watched over the life of the young Britannicus, and the profound policy by which she endeavoured to prolong her own government, are sufficient evidences. Agrippina is reported to have said to one, who, by betraying her confidence, has rendered her apothegm historical—"The reign of Nero has began as that of Augustus ended; but when I am gone, it will end as that of Augustus began:" the awful prophecy was soon accomplished.

These well founded fears give a clue to many solecisms in the conduct of Agrippina, who, vibrating between her powerful instincts, and her nobler views for a mighty empire, alternately appears in all the wisdom of a great stateswoman, and in all the feebleness of a fond mother.

While Nero was still making public professions of moderation and modesty, he was already secretly indulging in dissolute habits, and acquiring an independent volition by the indulgence of his passions. A growing sense of that irresponsible power, which maddens all in whom it is awakened, rendered him gradually more negligent of his mother's counsels, and more impatient of her control. Agrippina, with the indiscretion of a fretful jealousy, sternly interfered with his inordinate passion for his beautiful mistress, Acte, and reproved his neglect of his own wife for the dissolute Poppæa, whom he had forced from her husband, the bravest of his generals. Her aversion for Anicetus, the freed slave and preceptor of Nero's childhood, her increasing coldness towards Pallas, who was winning favour with the emperor by degrading submissions, and her ill-concealed suspicion of Burrhus and Seneca, all contributed to widen the breach between the dissimulating son and the impetuous mother, which ended in the ruin of both.

Still Agrippina remained standing in the gap between present prosperity and future desolation, public and private; but she already stood alone. As power melted from her hands, and strengthened in those of Nero, her partisans dropped off, her friends deserted. Seneca and Burrhus, who had secretly favoured the profligacy of their imperial pupil, under the shallow plea that, by indulging his passions, they were softening his nature, obtained an influence over the mind of the emperor, of which Agrippina was the vigilant and indignant observer. She who had so long known Seneca, and had prized and used his talents while she despised his character,—she who was so well aware that his enormous wealth, (acquired since she had recalled him from exile,) had been increased by inordinate avarice,—she who had seen through the ductility of the brave Burrhus, and found it applicable to every emergency,—was thrown off her guard by their ingratitude and desertion; and she burst forth against both, in that flow of feminine invective, in that strain of sarcastic and witty irony, for which she was so celebrated and so feared.

Her quondam friends and *protégés*, thus converted into irreconcilable enemies, were added to the increasing number of those who were desirous of her ruin, and willing to effect it at any risk. By her reduction of the public expenditure, and by the order she had introduced into the imperial household, Agrippina may have been considered as at the head of the reform party of the day; and Nero, aware of her popularity, continued to pay her respectful, but cold, homage in public: but he already rejected her advice, and avoided her society. While he sent her magnificent presents, he lessened her influence, until scarcely a vestige of her former power in the government remained.

On the occasion of a public reception given to an embassy from the East, the internal dissensions of the court were manifested in overt act. When Agrippina, in the exercise of the imperial rights granted to her by Claudius and the senate, moved forward to take her usual place beside the emperor, Nero sprang forward with officious

courtesy and ironical respect, to prevent the accomplishment of her intention. After this public insult, which provoked the smiles of the courtiers, but filled the empress mother with rage, Agrippina lost all self-control. She no longer complained, but threatened; she talked of drawing out the young Britannicus from his retreat, of presenting him to the Prætorian guards, and of relating the motives under which she acted, and the artifices by which she had preferred her own son to a throne of which he now appeared so unworthy.

Words, thus passionately and thus impoliticly uttered, were soon conveyed to the emperor. To awaken fear in a person so cowardly and so cruel, was to let loose his worst passions; and the designs of Agrippina (which, if seriously embraced, would have been more carefully concealed,) were frustrated by the murder of Britannicus—poisoned while supping with the emperor, in the presence of Octavia.

Agrippina was stunned by the boldness and atrocity of a crime which involved her own ruin. That Seneca and Burrhus were cognizant of the murder may be inferred from the large share which both obtained of the confiscated estates of the victim; but Agrippina lost in Britannicus her last security against the criminal machinations of her unnatural son; and she testified, says Tacitus, by her horror and consternation, her innocence of the crime, in which the malice of her enemies sought to involve her.

Still unsubdued, she boldly bound up her own fate with that of Rome; and is said to have allied herself with the most eminent patriots among the patrician malecontents, and to have even gained the tribunes by her eloquence, and the centurions by her largesses. Whether only suspected of these designs, or betrayed, Nero deprived her of her guards, replaced them by his own, and made her a prisoner in her own palace. It was at this period that Nero was accused of having attempted her life by poison; against which the unhappy mother, it is said, had fortified her constitution by antidotes.

The failure of the crime, if crime there was, (for, if the

story is in keeping with the character of the emperor, the circumstances will not stand the scrutiny of modern criticism), was followed by a reconciliation, to which the mother was only too ready to accede, and of which she was perhaps alone the dupe. But a new accusation was brought against her by Julia Silana, the widow of that Silanus, who had put himself to death on the event of Agrippina's marriage with Claudius. Julia discovered, or pretended to have discovered, a conspiracy contrived by the mother to dethrone her son, and to place Plautus, a descendant of Augustus, at the head of the empire. Agrippina pleaded her own cause; and, in a passionate outburst of feeling, exclaimed, "the woman who has made this accusation never had a son."

The defence was successful, and the accusation failed. Agrippina was declared innocent, her accuser was banished, and Nero, embracing his mother, covered her with caresses, and once more received her into his seeming confidence. But, if she were deceived by this show of affection, the world was not; and Agrippina, returning to her villa at Antium, was abandoned by all, save the few faithful servants who now composed her diminished household.

The eventful tragedy hastened rapidly to its last act. The awful catastrophe needs but a simple narration, to give it all that poetical interest, which is wanting to the dramatized murder of Britannicus.* Nero, though now resolved on the death of his mother, was perplexed by the difficulties which surrounded its perpetration; and he confided his distress to the slave to whose care Tiberius had consigned his infancy.

The stratagem which Anicetus proposed was at once adopted, as promising an all but certain success. Agrippina was still at Antium, when the plot was to be carried

* Racine's play, though bearing the name of Britannicus, derives its principal interest from Agrippina. It is evident that the author thought the murder of a mother too horrible for scenic representation; but, in selecting the precursory act, which leads to it, for his drama, he has sacrificed truth and effect to conventional propriety.

into execution. Nero had proceeded with the imperial court to Baiæ, to celebrate the festival of Minerva; and he despatched an affectionate message to his mother, (for "from such a mother, he observed, one must endure much and forgive all,") which brought the credulous or politic empress to his arms.

The imperial villa at Bauli stood at a short distance from the lovely shores of Baiæ; and the emperor, watching the approach of his mother's barge, sprang forward to assist her to land. When the moment arrived for their progress to Baiæ, another barge, remarkable for its elegance and splendour, was destined for Agrippina and her attendants. But a muttered warning from an unknown voice deterred her from accepting the distinction. Nero, thus foiled for the moment, laughed at her fears, increased his caresses, and assisted in placing her in her litter, when she determined to go by land.

During the festival, he placed her at his right hand, and talked to her, sometimes with familiar gayety, sometimes with an air of gravity that gave to his whispered sentences the air of state secrets. At an hour after midnight, Agrippina withdrew, leaving the younger guests to prolong their orgies. Nero himself conducted her to the barge, in which she was to return. Their parting, it is said, was marked by the strong emotion (whether of apprehension or of regret) of the emperor; who stood on the shore till the little vessel, on which his eyes were fixed, had disappeared behind a headland.

The night was calm and clear; the firmament sparkled with the lights of myriads of stars; and the sea, as if to accuse the criminal, was smooth as a mirror. The happy mother (then all a mother), reclined on a couch spread on the deck beneath a canopy of rich drapery; in the fulness of her heart, she continued conversing with Creperius Gallus, who stood near the helm, and with her freed woman, Acerronia, who lay at her feet. They were still felicitating her on her perfect reconciliation with the emperor, and spoke of happy days to come for Rome and for the world, when the canopy above them suddenly

fell with a tremendous crash, which proved it to be laden with lead and iron. Gallus was killed on the spot. A rower, rushing forward to despatch the empress, arrested the attention of Acerronia, who, exclaiming, "You mistake —I am Agrippina," received the blow on her bosom, and expired. Agrippina, with her usual energy and presence of mind, plunged into the calm waters, and was taken up by a vessel from the Lucrine Lake and conveyed to Bauli in safety.

Nero received the intelligence of the failure of his machinations with horror and consternation. Agrippina, alive and aware of his meditated crime, was a witness against him to the world, and to posterity. The conviction served only to increase his ferocity; and no longer seeking his advice from slaves and freedmen, he summoned his graver counsellors, Seneca and Burrhus, to his presence. He stated to them his complaints against his mother, and appealed to their judgment on the necessity of getting rid of her, and the means of effecting the desirable purpose. Seneca, the cautious and wily—willing to strike, but fearful to speak,—signed with his head to Burrhus. The stout soldier, equally vile, but more dauntless than the philosopher, observed that the Prætorian cohorts would never stand calmly by to witness the death of the daughter of Germanicus, murdered in cold blood; and he advised that Anicetus, the one man in Rome capable of the perilous act, should be intrusted with its consummation.

It was evening when this awful council was held; it was scarcely night when Anicetus and a party of soldiers landed on the flowery shores of Bauli, and crept with noiseless steps to the silent villa where Agrippina lay on her restless couch, confiding to her female slave her suffering and her suspicions. The soldiers had surrounded the palace, when Anicetus, with a centurion and others, burst open the doors, seizing the slaves they met in their way. When they reached the half-lighted chamber of the empress, the slave with whom she was conversing screamed and fled. Aggrippina, raising herself, with all

the assumed dignity of her birth and station, exclaimed, "If you are sent to inquire after my health, tell the emperor I am better. But if you come with evil intent, beware; my son can never have commanded a parricide."

To this artful but noble apostrophe, the captain of the galley replied by striking the empress on the head. Roused, rather than stunned, by the blow, she sprang up like a wounded lioness, and, observing the centurion drawing his sword, she rent aside her drapery, and cried —"Strike here! This is the womb that gave birth to Nero!" The centurion obeyed; and, under the reiterated blows of her murderers, the mother of the world's master sank, without further resistance, and fell dead upon her couch.

Thus perished Julia Agrippina, after a glorious reign of ten years. Suspected of great crimes, history has best proved her great qualities. During the last five years of her husband's, and the first five of her son's reign, she gave peace and prosperity to the empire by the sagacity of her administration; and she carried on the light of mind by the encouragement of the lettered. Personally distinguished as she was intellectually endowed, the noblest artists of her own and of modern times have stood indebted to the beauty of her form for their models of symmetry and grace; and the greatest historian of Rome, in making her authorship his own,* may owe something of the terseness of his style to the brevity of her wit, which spoke in epigram. Her faults belonged to the bad men and bad age in which she lived—the worst on record: her virtues and her genius were her own. She inherited them from Agrippa, the friend and counsellor of Augustus, and from Agrippina, the wife of Germanicus.

Her remains, beautiful even in death, were burned with indecent haste, on the couch where she fell. As the flames arose, Mnester, a freedman of the empress, pierced his bosom with his sword; and, springing upon the pyre, mingled his memory, for ever, with that of the daughter of Germanicus. To that memory Nero raised no tomb;

* Tacitus.

to its honour Seneca composed no oration. The emperor, like an emancipated spirit of evil exulting in his crime, wrote boldly to the senate to avow the deed; and Seneca wrote also to justify it. When the fêtes of Minerva were over, Nero returned to Rome; and the people rushed forth round his golden chariot, and hailed the parricide with joyous acclamations.

It was not till after his death, that the household slaves of Agrippina ventured to raise a lowly monument to their mistress, near a ruined villa of Julius Cæsar, on the high road to Misenum. After a sweep of nearly two thousand years, when the traveller wanders along the delicious shores of Baiæ, and tracks the steps of antiquity, some simple cicerone is sure to guide him to the spot, and, pointing, with a sigh of traditional sympathy, to an almost illegible inscription, traced on a mouldering rock, observes:

Ecco la tomba della Grande Agrippina.

CHAPTER V.

The Women of Rome under the Empire continued. Epicharis. Polla Argenteria. Paulina. Pomponia Grecina.

The death of Agrippina was closely followed by the accomplishment of her prophecy. Nero threw off the last restraints which a feeble reason and a doubtful humanity had imposed on his frantic cruelty. The events of his subsequent reign are marked in blood; but the brief and graphic historian, who has lent his genius to illustrate them, is in the hands of the educated, from Indus to the Pole; and their recapitulation is unnecessary. The striking circumstance, the warning moral, derivable from the nar-

rative, and deserving to be held forth to all posterity, is the fact, that mankind submitted to this madman; and that, among the base and craven slaves who pandered to his power, were some of the most polished intellects of the age.

Still, Rome was not wholly destitute of men, and of women, too, whose spirit revolted against the ruthless cruelty of Nero, and who were resolved on his destruction at all sacrifices. A conspiracy was formed by Caius Piso, who had rendered himself popular by his private and his public virtues, by his genius, and by the brilliant versatility of his talents. He had already incurred the hate and the suspicion of Nero, as being among the men marked out as his successor to the empire.

Into this conspiracy a woman was admitted, who soon became its vivifying spirit, and most efficient partisan; this was Epicharis, an enfranchised slave, whose early and predestined life had rendered her celebrated for her beauty and her conquests, but could not have prepared her to sustain the weight of a perilous enterprise in which the interests of a mighty empire were involved. In her eagerness for a crisis, she had proposed engaging in the plot the officers of the marine, and had succeeded in the attempt. But, among their number, some one of her new adherents, either in fear or in avarice, denounced the conspiracy, and involved in his accusations some of the most eminent and best men of Rome.

It was still in the power of Piso, through his favour with the army, and his popularity with the people, to have had himself proclaimed emperor; or he might have retreated to some distant province, and awaited the death of Nero by other hands; but, despairing of a world from which liberty was banished, he refused to live; and, retiring to his villa, he was found, by the officers sent to arrest him, with his veins open, and dead upon his couch.

Epicharis was taken alive, and brought into the presence of Nero, who mingled all the seductions of a man not destitute in the arts of persuasion, with all the terrors of the tyrant, to flatter or to betray her into the revelations he

desired: but no blandishment disturbed, no torture subdued, the constancy of her nature. Scourges, hot irons, the sword, and the fagot, were applied to her delicate person to extort a name, and were applied in vain. Not one word that could compromise an accomplice escaped her lips; and, mangled and tortured, she was taken back to her prison. There, while her guards were employed, in a distant part of the chamber, in preparing new instruments of torture, she strangled herself with a scarf, with which she fastened her neck to the back of her chair, and carried with her the secret of her brave heart, that, if revealed, would have compromised the lives of hundreds.

But there were others engaged in the plot; Seneca and Lucan—the stoic philosopher and the elegant versifier! They, the preceptor, the friends, and the favourites of Nero, had joined in the political movements; and how did they act? They died as they had lived, in the indulgence of their habitual egotism, and in that feebleness of spirit which belongs to the littleness of inordinate vanity, however brilliant the talent with which it may be accompanied.

Lucan, a young literary adventurer from Cordova, had recommended himself to the emperor's notice by poetical panegyrics on the imperial author. Received into high favour at court, and promoted to office, his short-sighted self-sufficiency led him to enter the lists with the imperial author of "Niobe." The laurel was won by Lucan; and Nero, who could bear no rival near the throne, even of Parnassus, treated him from that time with indignity and contempt.

Confounding his own wrongs with those of his country, Lucan readily entered into the conspiracy of Piso, and was condemned to death. Under these circumstances, he has been accused, (let it be hoped falsely), of having denounced his own mother, in the hope of purchasing pardon from his parricide master. But his life was not saved by the atrocious complaisance; and the only favour he obtained was the choice of his death. He chose that of the gentlemen stoics of the day—the warm bath and an open artery;

and he expired in all the vanity of authorship, reciting his own verses.

To his wife, Polla Argenteria, he assigned the more difficult task of surviving him, but of surviving him only to copy that poem destined to immortalize his memory. As she supported him in his last moments, she consented to live, and to become the preserver of his work, the guardian of his fame. All Rome bore testimony to the courage with which she accepted this office, and to the judgment with which it was executed. Shut up in her solitary retreat, with the bust of Lucan beside her, and clad in the deep weeds of widowhood, Polla Argenteria was seen, by those who had the courage to visit her, in the daily task of carefully revising the Pharsalia; and she thus presented an image of conjugal devotedness, and of intellectual capacity, well fitted to the highest inspirations of art, but which still remains for genius to embody and perpetuate.

The conspiracy of Piso furnished Nero with a pretext for the death of Seneca, against whom, however, the proofs were not very conclusive: but the enormous wealth of the quondam preceptor pointed him out as a probable successor to the empire; exciting at once the jealousy and cupidity of the tyrant pupil. That Seneca was acquainted with the conspiracy, and even with the day and hour in which Nero was to perish, we are informed on the authority of Tacitus. The rhetorical philosopher attempted to explain away his conduct, and to clear himself of the suspicions which were raised against him; but the author of the treatise "of benefits," which opens with the maxim, that "services ill placed are necessarily ill repaid," though he had deceived Caligula, and for a while imposed on Agrippina, possessed no sophistry to baffle the cupidity of Nero.

Having, therefore, retired with his young wife, Paulina, from Rome to one of his villas in the Campania, he was seated at supper with her and with two friends, when the house was surrounded by soldiers, and the imperial sentence delivered to him. The manner of his death, like

that of Lucan, was left to himself. Assuming, for the inevitable occasion, the stoicism he had so ostentatiously professed, and so often conveniently shaken off, he prepared himself to die; observing that "such a mandate might well be expected from the tyrant, who had assassinated his own brother, (of whose property Seneca had shared the plunder,) and murdered his own mother," (to which Seneca had consented, and which he publicly justified:) a memorable instance of that *sera sapientia*, the offspring of a fear-awakened conscience, which, ever coming too late for profitable action, serves only to embitter the occasion which it cannot repair.

Seneca died as he had lived,—an egotist and a hypocrite, the Tartuffe of an austere and self-denying philosophy. When the excited feeling of his devoted wife broke forth in an impatient expression of a wish to die with her husband, he eagerly availed himself of the offer, and encouraged the sacrifice; and he beheld, without remorse, her full young veins pour forth their tide of life, while his own bled so slowly, that he was conveyed to a warm bath, to quicken their circulation.

But while Paulina was sinking, Nero, more merciful than the author of the treatise "on clemency," ordered that her wounds should be bound up, and her life saved. Thus deprived of his conjugal victim, Seneca turned to his attendants, whom he edified with strains of self-praise and mouth morality; observing, that though he had nought else to bequeath them, he left them the example of his life, the innocence of which they might imitate, and by imitating, gain immortality. Having thus shown his friends and followers how a philosopher could die, this counterfeit Socrates poured forth a libation to Jupiter Liberator, and surrendered himself to his fate.

Thus perished, with a falsehood on his lips, the man whom St. Jerome has not disdained to rank among Christian writers,* but whose memory is not the less consigned

* "D'anciennes éditions de Seneque contiennent quatorze lettres que ce philosophe aurait écrites à St. Paul; mais aujourd'hui ces lettres sont

to the immortal contempt of the truthful and the honest, in all future times and nations. But Paulina, the single-hearted and self-immolating, lived on, an object of veneration and respectful curiosity to all Rome: men came to gaze upon her pale and bloodless form, as upon a fine monument of Parian marble, chiselled by genius, to commemorate some great sacrifice of female virtue; a noble impersonation of the moral endurance of woman's affections, and of that sustaining tenderness which can suffer all, and even survive all, under the energizing excitement of a life-mastering sentiment. Paulina, while she lived, was the most eloquent monument of the cruelty and tyranny of the murderer of her husband, of him who was the master of her own destiny, and the enemy of all public and private excellence.

In the five years which filled up the interval from the death of Agrippina to that of Nero, the number, no less than the atrocity of the crimes committed by the tyrant and endured by the people, startles the belief of the most credulous, and might surpass the conception of the most depraved.

The parricide had suspended his career of blood guiltiness, to contend for the charioteer's prize at the Olympic games, (for Nero, with the true tendency of an animal temperament, loved to live with horses, and managed them better than any groom in the imperial stables:) but on his return to Rome, crowned with golden laurels, and surrounded by mimes and musicians, his murderous appetite again sought out the objects of its indulgence; and the monster, who had scarcely left a friend to destroy, turned his eyes upon the Empress Poppæa, his beautiful wife, in hatred and disgust. From the moment he had married her, she had lost the piquant charm of vice, her greatest attraction in the eyes of her satiated husband; and now,

généralement regardées comme apocryphes, quoique St. Augustin et St. Jerome les aient citées pour être de Seneque, et qu'on ait prouvé par des raisons ingénieuses la vraisemblance d'un commerce epistolaire entre le philosophe et l'apôtre.—*Vie de Seneque, Œuvres Complètes avec la traduction par Misord.*

after overwhelming her with outrage, he determined to put her to death.

His thirst of blood increasing, as it was fed by private murders and public executions, he observed, at one of his orgies, "Caligula wished that after him the world might perish; I wish it to be burnt, and to be the witness of its destruction." Ere the morning's dawn, Rome was in flames, and it was asserted that the imperial lyrist was seen, by the light of its flames, in the masquerade of a musician, reciting his own poem on the burning of Troy!

The greater part of such a capital as the world has never since beheld, was thus destroyed; and the terrified and drunken incendiary, on coming to his senses, added to his iniquity, by throwing the odious act upon a community which was at that time becoming numerous in Rome,—a community which, though preaching virtue, charity, the worship of one God, and the love of the universal species, had, as yet, been confounded with the despised Jews, and thus saved from persecution, by obscurity or contempt alone.

How little the sect was then known to the higher classes of the Romans, may be gathered from that powerful historian, to whose pages classical posterity looks as the best authority for the times they record. Nevertheless, in relating the horrible fact, with all its disgusting details, the historian has left behind him an indelible testimony of his incapability of reading the future in the present, a defect which has so often vitiated the judgments of those reputed the wisest in their generation. However lowly the persecuted sect might have been at the moment of the catastrophe, its dogmas, at the period when Tacitus wrote, were sufficiently known, to have redeemed it from the contempt with which he treats it; for it unquestionably exhibited, both in the nature of its doctrines, and in the rapidity of their dissemination, features well calculated to startle an inquiring and philosophical spectator.

Had Tacitus, in adopting the memoirs of Agrippina, borrowed also her perspicacity, he might have seen in the community "commonly known by the name of Chris-

tians," the nucleus of a system containing within it the seeds of a mighty revolution. By preaching the equality of all men in the sight of God, the followers of Jesus were bringing over the lowest and most numerous portion of mankind, the politically degraded, and the personally enslaved; while, by substituting for the absurd, worn out, grossly tangible creed of polytheism, an idealized and subtle belief in one invisible and inscrutable intelligence, (the last refinement of the most penetrating philosophers of Greece) they secured the ultimate adhesion of the speculative and the refined.

To the modern, at least, looking on the past from the vantage ground of experience, it seems scarcely possible to comprehend, how a calm and penetrating politician, like Tacitus, could have avoided seeing, in the utter prostration and effœteness of the Roman religion, (laughed at by the great, its ministers, and deserted by the common people for the grossest superstitions,) the causes of approaching destruction; or how could he have failed to behold in the Christian system the creation of an overruling necessity, —an adaptation to the wants of the times, predestined to success.

"From the death of Christ to that memorable rebellion of the Jews, which was terminated only by the ruin of Jerusalem," (says Gibbon,)* "we cannot discover any traces of Roman intolerance, unless they be found in the sudden, the transient, but cruel persecution, which was exercised by Nero against the Christians, when the capital of the empire was afflicted by fire, which raged beyond the memory or example of former ages." By this calamity, the monuments of Grecian art, and of Roman virtue, the trophies of the Punic and Gallic wars, the most holy temples and the most splendid palaces, were involved in one common destruction; and it was in vain that the vigilance of government neglected none of those precautions which tended to alleviate the evil; that the imperial gardens were thrown open to the distressed multitude, that temporary buildings were erected for their accommoda-

* Vol. ii.

tion; and that a plentiful supply of corn and provisions was distributed at a moderate price.

Still the voice of rumour accused the emperor himself of having been the incendiary of his own capital; and no prudence could defend him from the suspicion of the people, who believed that every crime might be justly imputed to the assassin of his mother and his wife.* Nero, therefore, attempted to remove the odious suspicion from himself, by accusing the Christians, "whom obscurity and innocence might have shielded from persecution."

The Jews, numerous in the capital, and oppressed in their own country, might have been deemed a much fitter object for the suspicions of the emperor and the people; but they had very recently possessed a protectress wanting to the humble Christians,—had a powerful advocate in the palace of Nero, and even in the heart of the tyrant himself. This was his own mistress and wife, Poppæa, who, while yet in power, had, (in conjunction with the actor Aliturus, the emperor's favourite, and himself of "the race of Abraham,") employed her intercession on behalf of the obnoxious Jews. But the lowly and misrepresented Galileans,† though left undisturbed by the late sagacious empress, had not as yet made their way to the palaces of imperial favourites, nor obtained protection on that site, where the head of their community was in future times to succeed in temporal power to the Cæsars, and in spiritual authority to the Pontifices Maximi of Rome.

"In the annals of the historian Tacitus, after the description of the terrible fire at Rome, we read," says a modern ecclesiastical historian,‡ "with sorrow and indignation, the following passage;" and the description is too authoritative and too graphic to be here omitted.

* Gibbon, vol. ii.

† "Under the appellation of Galileans, two distinctions of men were confounded, the most opposite to each other in their manners and principles: the disciples who had embraced the faith of Jesus of Nazareth, and the patriot zealots who had followed the standard of Judas the Gaulonite." The former were the friends, the latter were deemed the enemies of mankind.—*Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.*

‡ The Rev. George Waddington, in his History of the Church, p. 13.

"To suppress the common rumour that he had himself set fire to the city, Nero procured others to be accused, and inflicted exquisite punishments upon those people, who were held in abhorrence for their crimes, and were commonly known by the name of Christians. They had their denomination from Christus, who, in the reign of Tiberius, was put to death as a criminal, by the procurator, Pontius Pilate. This superstition, though checked for a while, broke out again, and spread not only over Judea, the source of this evil, but reached the city also, whither flow, from all quarters, all things vile and shameful, and where they find shelter and encouragement. At first, those only were apprehended who confessed themselves of that sect; afterwards a vast multitude was discovered by them, all of whom were condemned, not so much for the crime of burning the city, as for their enmity to mankind.* These executions were so contrived as to expose them to derision and contempt. Some were covered over with the skins of wild beasts, and torn to pieces by dogs; some were crucified; and others, having been daubed over with combustible materials, were set up as lights in the night time," &c.

But the imagination sinks, the heart withers, and every womanly sympathy writhes, under the belief that such things could be, and that man—the master of the temporal world—the supreme head of the species, "the Lord over all,"—should "play such tricks before high heaven," and should, in the short revolution of one day, have multiplied more crimes, and produced more sufferings, than the other sex (his self-assumed born servant) has left on record during the vast sweep of six thousand years.

Yet even in this worst epoch of indited story, there were some instances of the highest elevation of moral nature, such as might have glorified the best times and best communities. While "the sect called Christians" were still illuminating the gardens of Nero with their burning bodies, the blood of the victims was multiplying the number of

* *Odio humani generis convicti:* an equivocal expression, which may imply the enmity of mankind towards them.

their proselytes, if not among the men of Rome, at least among the women. The noble wife of an illustrious senator, the patrician Pomponia Grecina, was accused of the crime of Christianism! Nero, (sick, perhaps, of his own excesses, and in the temperance of surfeited satiety, which follows all brutal excess), handed over the suspected adherent of the new spiritual philosophy, to the ancient laws of Rome, which constituted the husband the sole judge, in all cases in which his wife was the accused culprit, (a curious proof of the real and legal state of womanhood in Rome in the first century of Christianity.) The husband heard her plead her cause at his tribunal; and whether she had or not "almost persuaded him to be a Christian," he declared her innocent, and acquitted her with all the power which the law accorded him.

But a still greater contemporary example of the highest virtue, combined with the noblest heroism, was, at this time, rescuing humanity from universal odium; and this example still came from woman, the great conservatress of humanity in all epochs of its impending extinction.

The great colossus of power and iniquity—the Roman state—(an eternal monument and warning to posterity,) though undermined and rotten within, was still powerful and imposing without; and bravery, the earliest, was also the last of its virtues. The spirit of all Rome still hovered over its remote camps; and the Romans, (no longer respected for their justice at home,) were still famed for their prowess in arms abroad.

While Nero found a pretext for burning the Christians in Rome, his worthy representative, therefore, in Britain, Suetonius Paulinus, was carrying fire and devastation, not only to the hearths of the conquered, but into the sombre forests of the Druidical worship; destroying at once the altars and the institutes, the religion and the liberty of a barbarous but free and brave people. The cruelty and brutal insults of some Roman centurions, towards the innocent daughters of a British chieftainess, (Boadicea, the leader or princess of the Iceni,) roused a spirit, which the

most oppressive burdens and severe persecutions had not armed into resistance.

Boadicea,* doubly armed by maternal vengeance and by patriot pride, headed the most powerful revolt ever raised against Roman power in Britain. Calpus, the Roman governor, was deposed: sixty thousand Romans were defeated. Suetonius Paulinus, surrounded by an armed and formidable multitude, in vain fortified himself in London: and, fearing to perish by famine, he gave battle, in spite of the inequality of numbers. But he recalled to his legions that they must now rely on the advantage which their tactics and discipline gave them over a disorderly multitude.

Boadicea, with her two daughters, was at the head of that tumultuous multitude; and from her war-chariot harangued and stilled them into silence as she spoke. "Every law, human and divine," (observes this orator of Nature's own school) "authorizes me, though I were a private individual, to wash out the shame inflicted on those my children, in the blood of the violators. But I go to fight, oh Britons, to avenge your wrongs with my own. Either we this day exterminate our tyrants, or we die in the glory of the attempt. It is better to die free, than to live dishonoured and enslaved!"

Boadicea gave the signal for the onset, and was said by the Romans themselves to have commanded with the skill of an experienced general, and to have fought with the courage of the bravest soldier. She fought in the only legitimate war—the fight of freedom, the salvation of her native land, and the destruction of the invading enemies of her country. Eighty thousand British patriots fell around her, and perished in the struggle. She also fell—but, like another royal patriot, by her own hand. No one British

* Boadicea, though stamped by the Romans of that day with the epithet of barbarian, and, in fact, the creature of another education, and other circumstances from those of the women of Rome, belongs to their history. At that time Rome had become the universe: and the accident of birth was not alone a sufficient ground for excluding any one who belonged to the annals of the empire, from a place in the general tableau of its moral condition.

prince or king had ever done so much for England as this woman; and Rome never vanquished a foe, whose fall covered its victors with deeper shame or fouler disgrace. The story of Boadicea, as queen, patriot, and mother, is one of the most dramatic in the history of woman; and her character and courage are among the brightest illuminations that irradiate its pages.

CHAPTER VI.

The Women of the Empire Sextilia. Veleda. Epinina. Domitia Longina.

THE death of Nero, in its manner and circumstances, was characterized by a poetical justice. Its perpetration, marked by horror and contempt, was an act of popular rage and indignation. The people who, during the life of the empress mother, had still, in the person of her son, revered the grandson of Germanicus, the lineal descendant of Augustus, and the last of the Julian race, now branded with execration the memory of the frantic tyrant, whose ruin nearly "involved that of the whole empire."* In the space of nineteen months, four successive princes perished by the sword, the Roman world was shaken by contending armies to its centre, and the danger of a general dissolution, moral and political, proceeding from unbridled military license, were circumstances which made the eulogium of her, whose reign had been one of wisdom and prosperity, and whose ashes still remained unhonoured on the shores of Baiæ.

Out of such elements of anarchy and disorganization, arose three passing phantoms, masters of the world, con-

* Gibbon, vol. i. p. 118.

jured up as if by the spell of some evil and magical power, from the crumbling fragments of the social and moral earthquake.

The brief existence of Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, gave a still further extension to the crimes and vices incidental to an unquestioned authority; and their rapid rise and downfall, "while it taught the armies to consider the Roman emperors as the creatures of their will," made them "the instruments of their license,"* and consummated the ruin of Roman liberty for ever. In this awful interval, the uncurbed passions and sensual appetites of man raged unrestricted, while the influence of woman's civilizing affections lay in abeyance, or was only called on in moments of man's direst exigency.

The virtues by which Galba had been distinguished as a subject, turned to vices, when he became emperor; and the puppet of the "Pedagogues" (as his three favourites were called, each of whom governed alternately, with different dispositions to evil,) became hateful as the plunderer of the people, and contemptible as the appraiser of the riches of the great. His short reign was only marked by two important facts: that he was the last emperor derived from the ancient nobility of Rome, and that he gave the first example of the election of an emperor in a foreign land.†

His colleague and successor Otho, (who in better times would have been a better man, and who would have been worthy to govern others, had he not, in the intoxication of unlimited power lost the power of governing himself,) soon shared his fate, and fell the victim of the circumstances in which he was placed. Both had banished all women from their courts, save the worst; yet Otho paid a last tribute to the generous sympathies of the sex; and, while the dagger destined for his self-destruction lay beside him, his last thought was given to his wife and sister. Having

* Gibbon, p. 120.

† Vulgato imperii arcano, posse principem alibi quam Romæ, fieri.—*Tacit. Hist.* L. i.

written letters, full of feeling, to both, commending his ashes to their care, he put himself to death.

The character and court of Vitellius, the proverbial *gourmand* of antiquity,* protected all the vices most fatal to the interests and happiness of woman. Vitellius, who had taken Nero for his model, and had made a solemn offering to his manes, had been, like the son of Agrippina, an object of the cares and fears of an enlightened and high-minded mother, (Sextilia,) whom, on his accession to power, he honoured with the name of Augusta. Sextilia, when she heard that her son was raised to the throne of the empire, wept in the bitterness of her heart, foreseeing in that event his death, and probably her own.

The event justified her apprehensions; for Vitellius, true to his type, and to his antecedents,† having learned a popular prophecy, which declared that, if he survived his mother, he would enjoy a prolonged life, forthwith banished her from his court. When, however, he discovered that he could not break her heart by his ferocious ingratitude, he put her to death.‡

* "Toutes les richesses de Rome suffisaient à peine aux dépenses de sa table : elle couta quatre-vingt-dix-millions de sesterces en quatre mois, on ruina des villes pour satisfaire à sa voracité."—*Segur, Hist. Universelle.*

It was said of Vitellius that he paid the revenues of a province for a supper: "had he lived," said Josephus, "he would have devoured the empire." But the science of the emperor, according to the modern philosophy of the cuisine, was by no means comparable to his extravagances; as his famous "dish of Minerva" sufficiently proves. In the fasti of epicurism, there is nothing less accordant to the principles of a healthful taste, than that dish which gave to the master of the world the reputation of the master-cook of his age. According to the receipt of Vitellius, his *chefs* were ordered to "take the livers of a thousand young eel pouts, the brains of as many pheasants, and the soft roes of as many lampreys," which, with a variety of other ingredients, too numerous to mention, composed this famous dish, called "the shield of Minerva," probably from the golden plateau on which it was first served. As all the great men of Rome cooked their way to his favour, his brother Lucius, to excel all others, gave him a supper, at which were served up two thousand dishes of fish, and seven thousand of fowl and game.

† He was the companion of Tiberius, was popular with Caligula for his skill in charioteering, with Claudius for his gambling, and with Nero for his vices and his flattery.

‡ Concerning the death of Sextilia, Suetonius says that "opinion was divided; that the emperor was suspected of having starved her, on ac-

From that moment all the barriers of humanity were thrown down. The excess of the emperor's debaucheries rendered his palace uninhabitable by virtuous women; and the empress, (one of the most virtuous,) obtained permission to retire to an humble and secluded dwelling in the most remote and solitary part of the Aventine, where, forgotten by her brutified husband, she not improbably escaped a violent death, to which, in some moment of ferocious caprice, her "master" might have condemned her.

It is worthy, however, of observation, that when danger and difficulty fell upon this monster, his mind turned in sympathy towards his neglected wife; and Tacitus tells us that he gave up the struggle for throne and life, lest an obstinate resistance should harden the victor's heart against her and his children.

When the fears inspired by the crimes of Vitellius gave place to contempt for his vices, the awful prediction of his mother was accomplished. The legions raised the standard of revolt abroad, the Prætorians at home rejected their own choice, disgusted at his ferocious stupidity. Without availing himself of the chances of open war, Vitellius remained in Rome to await his doom. The people rose tumultuously; civil war raged in the streets, even to the gates of the palace; and the glorious capitol was taken by storm.

Vitellius, meantime, seated at supper, enjoyed his "dish of Minerva;" the battle raging without between his German guards and the people, and the flames rising from the cradle of Roman greatness. This, his last orgie, was accompanied by the murder of the prefect Sabinus, who was torn to pieces before his eyes, for having proclaimed Vespasian his successor. Having thus, for the last time

count of a German woman's prophecy, that he would enjoy a long and vigorous reign if he survived his mother; but others said that Sextilia, worn out with a weariness of the present, and despair of the future, demanded poison at her son's hands, and obtained it without difficulty." Tacitus barely mentions her death, but in terms somewhat suspicious. "Erat illi (he says) et fessa ætate parens, quæ tamen paucis ante diebus opportunâ morte, excidium domus prævenit; nihil principatu filii ademta, nisi luctum et bonam famam."

enjoyed the delicacies of a copious feast, the emperor, (whom nothing could determine to fight like a soldier, or die like a man,) escaped in disguise, accompanied by his cook and confectioner, and fled to his wife, who received him in his direst adversity, as if she had not been banished from his splendid prosperity.

Deceived by false intelligence, he returned to the palace, and found it a desert. Loading his girdle with gold coin, he next attempted to hide behind the bed of one of the palace porters, where he was attacked by dogs, discovered, and dragged, half naked and bleeding, to the forum: there, overwhelmed with outrages, he was slain, and his body cast into the Tiber.

Of the brief and infamous reign of this monster, nothing remains for posterity but a brief record of his crimes, and of the corruption and cowardice of the people who endured them. His wise mother and gentle wife are known only by their virtues and their wrongs.

The star of the Flavian family, which, though destined to shed future glories on Rome, had arisen obscurely and unobserved, lighted the virtues of Vespasian and the genius of Titus to the throne of the world;*—and, under the successive mild and wise administrations of the father and the son, (who laughed at the genealogy ascribed to them by parasitical flatterers,) humanity enjoyed a transient repose. Vespasian, too great and sagacious to accept the dangerous part of despot, (assigned to him by the base senate, even while they affected to preserve to Rome the title of republic,) terminated the civil wars of Rome with glory to himself, and salvation to the people.

A foreign war, however, suddenly broke out, which exposed the emperor and the empire to imminent peril: it was a war of patriotism, and it was kindled in Batavia, under the military command of Claudius Civilis, a victim of the cruelty of Vitellius, who was doubly animated by the desire of vengeance, and the love of liberty. His deep-seated hatred to the tyrant emperor, which had long lain

* A. D. 96.

dormant, suddenly burst forth into an unexpected resistance to Rome.

The echoes of the long-silent forests of Germany were then again awakened by the passionate eloquence of a patriot prophetess, whose counsels were received like oracles, and whose watchword was—liberty. Her name was Veleda,* her habitation an antique tower, embosomed in a gloomy wood. Her lonely retreat became a beacon of wisdom to her barbarian countrymen; and even the eminent and the ambitious of the most civilized communities sought the tower of the female seer, to obtain her counsels, and to profit by her spirit-stirring words. Among these came Claudius Civilis; and the result of this communication was a war, that threatened the existence of the Roman power in Germany.

The sympathies of various tribes and nations rallied, at the call of the oppressed Germans, against Rome. A formidable army suddenly arose from the whispered conspiracies of Veleda's forest tower. The Gauls made common cause with their Teutonic neighbours; and the Druids and Druidesses, so long proscribed and persecuted by the latter Cæsars for their religion's sake, animated the people and their leaders. Langres, Treves, and other important cities, caught the contagion of revolt, which spread even to the Roman camp. The result of the war need not here be related; but the great part played by the German prophetess is not only memorable in itself, but appears not to have been without its influence on Vespasian, in that one act which was the sole blot of his reign, the condemnation and death of the illustrious Eponina.

The condemnation of this heroic woman was an act of cruelty, which no political expediency could justify, and which the humanity of all ages has condemned; but it served as a dark ground to enhance the lustre of the virtues of a devoted woman, whose example proved that

* "Inesse quinetiam sanctum aliquid (in feminis) et providum putant; nec aut concilia earum aspernantur aut responsa negligunt. Vidimus, sub Divo Vespasiano, Velidam diu apud plerosque numinis loco habitam."—*Tacitus de Mor. Germ.*

eighty years of crime and demoralization had still left models of female heroism and virtue, to dignify the sex, and to redeem the species from utter degradation.

Julius Sabinus, (who had assumed the name of Cæsar,) when pursued after his defeat by the government, had taken leave of his friends, sent back his slaves, and set fire to his house, in which it was believed he had perished. He had, however, retired to the deep recesses of a cavern, followed only by two slaves, to whom he had given freedom, and of whose fidelity he was assured. His young wife, Eponina, whose conjugal piety was the theme of universal respect at Rome, gave herself up to the most violent despair. She desired to renounce a life that had now become a burden; and her unfeigned grief favoured the belief that her husband no longer existed. In pity to her sufferings, Sabinus at last secretly informed her of his existence and his retreat; when Eponina, (having prolonged for a time the appearance of her grief to lull suspicion,) flew to share the voluntary captivity of her husband, withdrawing from the world with the object which alone had made life of value to her.

In the depths of an obscure cave, in a remote forest, under every privation, she gave birth to two children; but, whether from treachery or imprudence, the retreat of this unfortunate family was at last discovered. They were brought in chains before Vespasian, who, at their appearance, was observed to shed tears, and seemed almost inclined to yield to the touching prayers of the noble and suppliant Eponina. The habit of that age, and the politics of the times, the alarms of the senate, and the advice of Mucian, were the assigned motives of his sacrificing his compassion to state policy. He condemned the illustrious outlaws to be executed, and reserved his mercy exclusively for their infants.

At the moment that Eponina was about to be led to execution, she recovered that pride, which her fears and her hopes for the safety of her husband had alike prostrated; and, turning indignantly to the emperor, she boldly exclaimed, "Learn, Vespasian, that I have enjoyed more

happiness in the performances of my duties, and in prolonging the days of your victim, though but in the rude recess of an obscure cavern, than you will henceforth ever enjoy, amidst the splendours that surround your throne."

The glory of martyrdom and the sympathies of the Roman people accompanied Eponina to the scaffold; remorse and shame remained in the palace of the emperor, who erred but once, and that once through the instinctive violence and injustice of the master towards the servant. It was upon this occasion that Vespasian might have uttered, "I am then a man after all," with a far more humiliating conviction of the fact, than when the insolence of Mucian irritated him into a momentary fit of passion, and, by disturbing the even tenour of his philosophic temper, called forth that well-known and self-glorifying exclamation.

Under the mild and splendid reign of Titus, (Vespasian's son and successor) the Roman world enjoyed a transient felicity; but even his character has not escaped suspicion and reproach. His rigorous severity to the Jews, which, in the judgment of posterity, has stained his memory with the imputation of cruelty, was, however, favourably construed by a people, who, during an interval of eighty years, had been the victims and witnesses of the wanton ferocity of their imperial tyrants.

But Titus, permitted to be cruel with impunity, was reproached with feebleness, when his predilection for the society of woman was known; and he was reviled for giving to the sex an empire over his passions and his will, fatal to his own glory, and dangerous to the prosperity of the empire. Arriving in Rome, after his sanguinary conquests in the East, accompanied by the far-famed Berenice, the beautiful daughter of the king of Judea, he gave himself up without reserve to a passion the most publicly testified, for this foreign queen; and he thus shocked the prejudices of the Romans, whose conventional fastidiousness (it would appear) had long survived their moral feeling.

Berenice had followed Titus to Rome, and for a time inhabited his palace; she had even received his promise of marriage. But the master of the world evinced his mastery over himself, by discarding his beautiful mistress; and, by this one act, he obtained a brighter fame than that which even his conquest of Jerusalem, and all his success as a warrior and a statesman, had procured for him.

The reign of his successor and brother, Domitian, was the reign of every crime, and the triumph of every vice; and the low ebb to which the moral condition of society was reduced in Rome, by the influence of his predecessors, and the manners of his own court and of society, though preserved in the bitter satires of Juvenal, and by the epigrammatic wit of Martial, ought, perhaps, for the good of mankind, to be for ever erased from the records of history. Still, however, in such details of a general social depravity, the frailties of one sex bear no proportion to the selfish vices and sanguinary crimes of the other.

The condition of woman, elevated in public consideration during the two wise and preceding reigns, fell, with a fearful rapidity, during the monstrous despotism of Domitian. Their virtues or their genius became a mark for proscription, in some instances for death; and he who waged open war against the lettered and enlightened among the men—who sent Epictetus to compose his morals in exile and in chains—who punished Maternus* and Julius Rusticus with death, for having told the truth and eulogized the virtuous—was well worthy to offer premiums for female corruption, and to give out a maxim which had the force of an edict, "that woman was a natural-born slave, and man her divine righted master."

But the shameful passions, the odious vices, the beastly sensuality, and ingenious cruelty of Domitian, amounting to delirium, did not prevent statues of gold being erected to the glory of a degraded monster, who, while he im-

* Maternus wrote a book against tyranny. Julius Rusticus made an Elogium on Thrasea and on Helvidius Priscus.

piously took the title of "Lord and God," sought amusement in witnessing the tortures of his fellow-creatures, and gloated over human agonies, with a voluptuous enjoyment, that savoured of the most ferocious species of monomania!

His palaces swarmed with spies, parasites, and courtezans; he always went in public to the baths and theatres, surrounded by the shameless harpies whose sordid avidity preyed upon the labours of the Roman citizens,—of those very citizens, whose prudery had taken exception to the attachment of Titus for Berenice, and in whom all sense of moral right, and all idea of public spirit, seemed crushed and extinguished.

Still, in the palace of the emperor, in the very bosom of his family, the mild and beneficent tenets of the new reforming faith had found their way. The cousin-german of Domitian, Flavius Clemens, avowed his conversion from Pagan orthodoxy, by deserting the altars of Jove for those of Jehovah, and was put to death. The fair and courageous relation of Domitian, the beautiful Domitella, made the same hazardous confession, and escaped a public execution, by a perpetual exile. To flatter the increasing bigotry of the besotted people, Domitian revived the most violent persecution against the preachers of "peace and good-will to all men;" a dogma, indeed, which must have been sufficiently formidable to the monster tyrant himself, whose vocation was to trample on all human affections, and to uphold the exclusive selfishness of unrestricted power. Domitian, the murderer and parricide, came forward, like Nero, as the orthodox conservator of that antique and worn-out theology, the state religion of the empire; and none were spared, when accused of propagating the new doctrine, or worshipping at its altars.

Feared and hated in his own family, as throughout the world, he had long held his wife, the Empress Domitia Longina,* as the special object of his capricious passions.

* Suetonius.

Alternately actuated by preference or by satiety, he had formally repudiated and driven her from his palace, then wooed her back to his embraces, and restored her to the honours of his empress and wife; and when finally he resolved to guard against all future weaknesses, by putting her to death, his premeditated crime against his wife became the cause of his own destruction.

Domitian had already put to death the most illustrious senators; and others of almost equal note had fallen victims to his suspicious jealousy, and his insatiable appetite for blood; but the envious murderer of the glorious Agricola still sought to satisfy his unquenched cruelty, by witnessing the dying agonies of the woman he had most loved, and had most wronged.

"Domitia Longina, the daughter of Corbulo," says one of her biographers, "was endowed with an exquisite beauty, an extreme desire to please, and a mind lofty and capable of the highest enterprises," qualities eminently favourable or fatal to their possessor, according to the judgment associated with their exercise, or to the circumstances by which they are fated to be directed and controlled. Torn by the powerful Domitian, while yet in his second consulate, from the private circles which her beauty and her wit were calculated to brighten, and where her vanity and ambition might have lain for ever dormant, she was forcibly carried off by the Cæsar of the day; who, trampling upon every law, human and divine, separated her from her husband, Ælius Lamia, and married her in the face of all Rome.

On becoming emperor, Domitian raised her to the throne, by the style and title of Augusta, placed her at the head of his depraved court, initiated her in its orgies, and exposed her to all its temptations. From such an abyss of vice it was impossible to escape without taint;—and, if the vain and beautiful Domitia was frail, the master who outraged and perverted her was responsible for her frailty. Whatever were her sins, they never extended to any violation of nature,—a sort of negative virtue in that age; and the gallantry of which she was accused, (common to

the time, to the caste, and to the court in which she lived,) became almost venial, when compared with the atrocious crimes and disgusting vices of her brute master and his male associates.*

Whatever was the extent of Domitia's frailty, it served the purpose of her stupid and incontinent husband to found accusations against her conduct, and to expose her, through his parasites and paid scandal-mongers, to cotemporary condemnation, and to the indolent and uninquiring contempt of posterity; for history has few doubts where the assumed errors of woman are in question. Suspected, or at least accused by Domitian, of exciting a deeper interest in the Emperor Titus than his known admiration of her talents accounted for, she made her own defence, and was cleared of the aspersion by the tribunal to which she appealed.

Domitian, with reviving passion, again placed her on a throne from which he soon sought once more to hurl her. But scarcely separated, he again took her back with increasing fondness, and declared, what was perfectly true, "that he did so in obedience to the voice of the people." It was in the midst of this seeming affection, that he resolved on her death.

A happy accident threw into the hands of the empress the black catalogue of proscriptions, on which the emperor had inscribed the names of the chief confidential officers of his own household; and at the head of the list stood that of the empress herself. Among the rest were Parthenius, the prefect of the palace, and Stephanus, the chamberlain, together with the two brave generals, Norbanus and Petronius. Domitia instantly warned them of their danger, that they might save themselves by flight. They took the warning, but remained to destroy the meditated destroyer of their lives. The conspiracy which ended in the death of the most disgustingly sanguinary of the Roman tyrants, was merely domestic; and it resem-

* Domitia was a patroness and a lover of letters; she protected the Jewish historian Josephus with steady friendship, even while Titus and Domitian persecuted his nation and destroyed its capital.

bled, in the manner of its execution, some similar scenes enacted in the imperial chambers of the reckless despots of modern times.

Domitian had retired from one of his sumptuous orgies to his magnificent dormitory, and already slept on the eider-down of his purple couch, (for the wicked sleep soundly, under the influence of the same insensibility which makes them criminal,) when the raging of a pitiless storm disturbed his surfeit slumbers; and the lightning, whose vivid flashes were reflected on the mirrored surface of the walls,* awakened the fears of the powerful tyrant, who was said to be as superstitious as the most ignorant of his subjects.

Domitian instantly despatched a messenger for a noted astrologer, to consult his occult wisdom on the conflict of the elements, so awful and perhaps portentous. The shallow seer explained the phenomenon, as the forerunner of a great political revolution; and the emperor, in the feverish irritability of guilt and fear, ordered the unhappy prophet to be put to death.

He then rose, and declared his intention of going to the bath, to soothe his perturbed spirits; but Parthenius and Stephanus counselled him not to leave the security of the imperial apartment. Confessing, with a frank duplicity, that the prediction of the astrologer was not unfounded, they declared that there was a conspiracy formed against his life, and that they had possessed themselves of a list of the names of the conspirators, which they now presented to him. Domitian, astounded, took the list from their hands, and, bending his head to peruse it,—perished.

Thus fell the last of the twelve Cæsars. He owed his death to the woman he had outraged and perverted, but who was neither concerned in the conspiracy, nor present at its execution. The innocence of Domitia Longina on this point was never doubted, but by one writer of no great

* The walls of some of his apartments were inlaid with polished stones, which reflected all that was doing,—a part of the system of espionage carried on in the palace.

authority;* and her wrongs and her merits were acknowledged both by the senate and the people. The latter hailed her with acclamations, and the former invited the imperial widow to appear before its tribunal, to receive the expression of its respects, and to offer her whatever of her husband's vast possessions she might please to accept. Domitia declined their munificent liberality, and only asked permission to raise a statue to the memory of him who had elevated her to the throne of the empire. The request was granted, after the people had flung down with execration the golden statues of Domitian, which they had once raised to his glory; so that after his death nothing remained to recall his monstrous existence, but a portrait effigy in marble, which was erected on the Via Capitolina by his widow, and which, for her sake only, was permitted to remain. The sanguinary reign of Domitian might have passed in horror and in shame to oblivion, had not his crimes been immortalized in the pages of Tacitus, and his ridicules and his vices preserved in the covert and racy ridicule of Juvenal.

CHAPTER VII.

The Women of the Empire. Plotina Pompeia. Julia Sabina. The Empress Faustina.

To the dark age, over whose sanguinary gloom the genius of Vespasian and Titus alone shed a transient light, succeeded a century, which, like the *Trève de Dieu* of more modern barbarism, gave humanity breathing time, and checked that impulsion to utter disorganization, by which society seemed to be mastered. This bright epoch of

* "One writer only," says Bayle, "notices the possibility of Domitia having been in the conspiracy, of which she was certainly the cause, and this was Aurelius Victor."

Roman story owed its serenity to the sagacious government and well conditioned characters of Nerva, Trajan, Adrian, the two Antonines, and Marcus Aurelius. Though the nature of this tenure was precarious, the people enjoyed under it all the prosperity which may be derived from a felicitous alliance of monarchy and liberty. "Happy times," (says Tacitus, expatiating upon this golden age of political history,) "happy times, when every man thought what he spoke, and spoke what he thought!"

During this prosperous interval, however, neither institutions nor popular efforts had any share in protecting the common rights of humanity. The men placed at the head of the empire, during the second century of the Christian era were foreigners. Born in classes, among which the sympathies were cherished, and reared far from the brutifying associations of tyranny and slavery, they were men, not monsters; and they were chosen, under the prevalence of absolute power, and in a degraded society, as the best expedients to which outraged humanity could resort in moments of direst urgency.

The same men who had destroyed the atrocious Domitian, proposed the wise, the mild, and moderate Nerva, as his successor,—the senate and the people approving the choice. The Prætorians, (the "physical force men" of the day,) alone testified their dissatisfaction by a sullen and suspicious silence. They alone regretted their brute protector, who had raised their power and their pay beyond all former precedent; and they feared a reign which promised so little to a body important only in the worst of times, and to the worst of men.

Nerva, the lover of letters and humanity, the friend of Quinctilian, of Pliny, and of Tacitus, (of whom the two latter honoured the consulate, to which he raised them,) forwarded the great cause of reform, whencesoever it came. He ordered persecution for opinion sake to cease; he protected, by an imperial edict, the lowly dissenters from the faith of Olympus; and recalled the members of the new sect of Christianity, (so numerous in Rome, as among the

Gentiles every where,) from their remote exiles, to their hearths and homes in the capital.

He even permitted one of their persecuted leaders, (St. John of Nicomedia,) to return to his little community at Ephesus, and to preach his religion of charity, (a religion as yet nearly without forms or worldly distinctions,) within view of the gorgeous shrines of Diana, and her oracular priesthood,—mingling with the poetical Io Peans of the established mythology, his doctrine of humanity—his ritual of the heart:—"My children, love one another."*

This beneficent reign of fifteen months terminated with the life of the venerable Nerva, leaving the throne of the world to one, who eminently possessed the great quality wanting to his predecessor, firmness of purpose (the perseverance that banishes danger by braving it,)—a quality which, in sovereigns and warriors, inspires that confidence in others, by which they are themselves impelled.

Nerva, the wisest of the Roman emperors, and the first of foreign extraction, had named, as his colleague and successor, Trajan, a stranger, like himself, whose heroic courage and grandeur of mind had already recommended him to the senate and to the army. A native of Seville, he had arrived in Rome, a soldier of fortune, and the son of a father who had raised his obscure name by his bravery in the war against the Jews. Trajan had himself fought the campaigns of Asia, Africa, and Germany, with honour and renown.

Hardy under fatigue, wise in council, and spirited in action, he partook of the fatigues and privations of the common soldier; and, by learning to obey, he acquired the first elements of a capacity to govern. After a series of glorious actions, he was recalled to Rome, to ascend the throne of the empire; and entered the capitol of the

* The Church of Ephesus, which was founded by St. Paul, and governed by Timothy, was blessed by the presence of St. John during the latest years of his long life. Of him it is related, on sufficient authority, that, when his infirmities no longer allowed him to perform the offices of religion, he continued ever to dismiss the society with this parting benediction—"My children, love one another."—*History of the Church, by the Rev. G. Waddington.*

world, not as the people had expected, (who went forth in multitudes to meet him,) with all the pomp and circumstance of a military triumph, and with all the insignia of imperial power, but in the simplicity of a citizen-soldier of the antique republican times, on foot, and attended by a few faithful followers, his companions in arms.

Scarcely had the new emperor passed into the spacious inclosure of that wondrous palace raised by Nero, (a city in itself,)* when a woman, simply habited, but of a noble bearing and a dignified beauty, demanded admission also into its vestibule.†

When challenged by the officers on duty, and asked whence she came, and who she was, that she presumed on so lofty a privilege at such a moment, she replied, with great simplicity, that she was Plotina Pompeia, the wife of Trajan. This modest announcement of the Cæsar's empress, the Augusta Diva of future worship, called forth the loudest acclamations of pleasure and surprise from the impressionable and delighted multitude. The soldiers, centurions, and lictors, hailed the new empress with the fluttering of their eagles, the flaunting of standards, and the elevation of the fasces which were carried before her.

On approaching the threshold of her future residence, she paused; and, gazing for a moment upon the vast and splendid sanctuary of power, polluted by so many vices, the monument of so many crimes, she turned to the people; and, raising her hands and eyes to heaven, exclaimed emphatically, "May the gods send me forth from this august palace, whenever I may be destined to leave it, even as I now enter it; and may the high destiny to which fortune now raises me leave me in possession of the same quali-

* This palace included in its walls the Palatine and Esquiline hills. Its immense gardens contained every description of scenery, pastoral and savage; and all the arts contributed to their decoration. For the "sovereign buffoon" of imperial Rome possessed both the taste of an artist's temperament and the world's wealth with which to indulge it.

† In this vestibule (whose walls were of alabaster studded with gems, whose floor was a marqueterie of ivory and gold,) stood the colossal statue of Nero, one hundred and twenty feet high. Among its singular luxuries was a roof, which let fall the most refreshing showers of perfumed waters.

ties with which I this day assume it!" Millions of voices responded to the prayer by enthusiastic cheerings; and the impression thus happily, or artfully, made on the public mind, was never afterwards effaced.

From that moment, the genius and the virtues of Plotina became exemplary in private manners, and influential in public affairs; and her character and accomplishments are among the strongest proofs of the moral and intellectual excellence which still clung to some of the women of Rome, at the epoch of its rapid decline, and on the eve of an overwhelming destruction of all existing civilization.

Plotina was a Roman lady by birth, and had been the early love and chosen partner of Trajan's earlier and humbler days, when he first arrived in Rome. She had accompanied her husband in his campaigns, sharing in his perils with the courage of a soldier's wife. She shared, too, his amazement and regrets, when, in his camp at Cologne, he received the news of an elevation, which he had neither solicited nor desired. The deepest satisfaction he derived from the event was the power it gave him to heal the wounds of the empire.

Placed on the throne of the empire, Plotina participated in all the anxieties of a nineteen years' reign, and in all the difficulties attendant on that usually "fatal pre-eminence." Scarcely accepting the title of empress, and declining that of Augusta, until the glorious epithet of *optimus* and the title of "father of his people" had been forced on her husband, she averted the envy of the great by her modesty, and won the affection of the people by her affability; and above all by the sympathy she exhibited for their wants and their desires. To her influence was attributed a diminution of the taxes, by which the provinces had been impoverished, irritated, and driven into insurrections:* and to her disinterested wisdom were ascribed many other financial reforms, which won for her imperial husband a love that long survived, in the hearts

* "Son humanité contribua beaucoup à la diminution des impots, dont les provinces etaient surchargées."—*Dictionnaire Historique et Critique.*

of the Roman people, the remembrance of his Dacian triumphs and his conquests in the East.

Remarkable for the dignity of her deportment, and for that moral decency* which respects all the exterior forms of life, (the *bienséance* of positive virtues,) she introduced by her example a censorship of taste, which extended its influence even to the lowest public amusements of the people. The most scandalous license had been permitted during former reigns, in the theatres and pantomimes; and Titus had endeavoured to suppress this indecency by an edict; but the corrupted people, seconded by a libertine aristocracy, had forced the Emperor Nerva to repeal the edict, and to restore the scandal. It was not until the improving influence of Trajan and Plotina was felt in the circles of Rome, that the people themselves, becoming disgusted with their own license, (or, as a modern historian observes, "*revenu au sentiment de la pudeur*,") called upon the government to renew the decree of Titus, and to annul the indulgences of the often too facile Nerva.†

The power of woman over the moral tastes of the public was never more strongly illustrated; and the example should not be lost upon posterity. The women of modern times, who boast the possession of a moral code of purer observance, and of more imposing sanction, have too generally abdicated this power, from deficiency in that moral courage, so necessary to resist the tyranny of fashion, and to withhold protection from practices or from persons in vogue, when they are at war with public decency. Society as at present constituted, is, in this respect, a perpetual compromise between principles and conventions,—an attempted reconcilement of the dignity of virtue with the conveniencies of sycophancy: and as

* Cette imperatrice amiable et bien faite, avait un air de décence et de gravité, son esprit etait élevé, et elle ne l'employait, que pour faire du bien.—*Dictionnaire Historique.*

† Among the grand ballets performed at the imperial theatres of ancient Rome, many enacted the stories "in praise of eminent women." But the grace and beauty of women was wanting in these public exhibitions; and if, in some of them, decency was violated, it was not by the sex whose interest it is to protect it.

the fault lies principally with the women, so does the penalty. The condition of public morals has in all ages been decisive of the place and consideration of the sex.

Equally occupied with the happiness as with the glory of Rome, Trajan and Plotina alike justified the panegyrics, which Pliny* lavished exclusively on the emperor; and realized the hopes of Plutarch,† expressed in that immortal letter which he addressed to his pupil, after he ascended the throne.

The beneficent forethought of the government soon extended to all the cities of Italy; and, to preserve them from the sudden famines to which they had been exposed by inordinate taxation, Trajan reformed the system of administration, protected the interest and the liberty of commerce, and, by this sole and simple means, preserved such an abundance to the people, that Egypt (the ancient granary of Italy), when struck by an accidental famine, applied for corn to Rome, and was supplied with it during the whole year. "The administration," (says Pliny,) "of the government was so wise on this subject, that there was always an abundance of corn in Rome, and want nowhere."

Simple in his manners, frugal in his domestic interior, indulgent to others, and severe only to himself, an encourager of merit, and a keen observer of those who possessed it, Trajan raised none to high employments in the government, but such as were qualified for public trust by their known private probity; and he despised the vulgar maxim that the corrupt citizen was capable of making an honest and an able minister. He was often

* "When you lived with us, you shared our dangers and our alarms—the penalties of virtue, under those princes who were detested even by those who perverted them. Now you reign, and your conduct is conformable to the sentiments you possessed as a citizen."

† "I shall be happy if your reign answers to the great qualities I have discovered in you; but, if power corrupts them, the danger will be yours —the ignominy mine: the crimes of Nero and of Alcibiades blasted the reputation of Seneca and Socrates, and they have been reproached with the vices of their respective pupils; but, if you continue all that I have known you to be, I shall be the happiest of men."—*Plutarch's Epistle to Trajan.*

heard to say, "I govern now, as I desired to be governed when I was a private subject."

Modern historians, however, indirectly accuse this great emperor of submitting too implicitly to the councils of his wife, and of being influenced in one of the most important acts of his life (the naming a successor to the empire) by the "arts of the empress."* His long, wise, and glorious reign, is an answer to the reproach; while the imputed influence of Plotina, over an administration so enlightened, a government so prosperous, is an immortal testimony of her genius, her sensibility, and her wisdom.

But there was a fault imputable to the early reign of Trajan, which may be taken more as an example of the fallibility of all human judgment, than considered as the result of an inherent cruelty. This was the temporary persecution of the Christians in the remote province of Bithynia, on the western extremity of the Euxine sea: a persecution sanctioned by the supreme government, on the false representations of its delegates. These readily found credence from the Roman people, the orthodox supporters of the state church of the Pantheon, who had just sated their love of blood, in celebrating the triumph of Trajan by the death of ten thousand gladiators.†

The people had heard with joy of the sufferings of the Christian reformers, whose increasing numbers and influence gave rise to the "no popery" cry of that day. But the milder intentions of Trajan were proved, by sending the humane and accomplished Pliny as governor to Pontus and Bithynia, during the heat of the persecution carried on by the proconsular government.‡ Pliny, after mentioning, in his well-known epistle to the emperor, the perplexities of a situation which placed him between contending parties, the one armed with power and prejudice, and the other a persecuted and oppressed community, "against whom he could find no crime"—thus proceeds,

* "In his last moments, the arts of the Empress Plotina either fixed the irresolution of Trajan, or boldly supposed a fictitious adoption."—*Gibbon*, vol. i.

† Segur. ‡ A. D. 107.

in a style which would answer the purpose of modern governors, who, in equally difficult positions, attempt the exercise of power instigated by charity, against power armed with prejudices and personal interests.

After mentioning the difficulty of proceeding against men charged with no other crime than the name of Christian, Pliny proceeds as follows:—"Others were named by an informer, who at first confessed themselves Christians, but afterwards denied it: some said that they had belonged to the community, but had since left it, (some three years, some longer, and one or two more above twenty years.) They all worshipped your image, and the statues of the gods; and these also reviled Christ. They affirmed that the whole of their fault or error* lay in this—that they were wont to meet together on a stated day, before it was light, and sing, among themselves alternately,† a hymn to Christ as to God, and bind themselves, by an oath, not to the commission of any wickedness, but to be guilty of no theft, or robbery, or adultery; never to falsify their word, nor to deny a pledge committed to them, when called upon to return it. When these things were performed, it was their custom to separate, and then to come together again to a meal, which they ate in common, without any disorder; but this they had forborne since the publication of my edict, by which, according to your commands, I prohibited associations.

"After receiving this account, I judged it the more necessary to examine, and that by torture, (alas for the philosopher!) two maid servants, which were called ministers; but I have discovered nothing beside a bad and excessive superstition.

"Suspending, therefore, all judicial proceedings, I have recourse to you for advice: for it has appeared to me matter highly deserving consideration, especially upon account of the great number of persons who are in danger of suffering; for many of all ages, of every rank, and of

* "Affirmabant autem hanc fuisse summam vel culpæ suæ vel erroris."

† *Secum invicem:* a remarkable evidence of the early use of Antiphony in the church service.

both sexes, are accused, and will be accused. Nor has the contagion of this superstition seized cities only, but the lesser towns also, and the open country; nevertheless, it seems to me that it may be restrained and corrected. It is certain that the temples, which were almost forsaken, begin to be more frequented; and the sacred solemnities, after a long intermission, are revived. Victims, likewise, are every where bought up, whereas, for a time, there were few purchasers. Whence it is easy to imagine what numbers of men might be reclaimed, if opportunity were granted them for repentance."

The most curious circumstance in this memorable epistle, (which is invaluable when so few works are extant to guide inquiry through this most obscure period of early Christianity,*) is the part which even the humblest women took in the new religion. The torturing of two servant maids, who were "called ministers," is not only a proof of the importance of female agency in the great change then effecting in human opinion, but (being given under the hand of the proconsul himself,†) is, perhaps, the truest as it is among the earliest evidences of female martyrdom on record.

The wise and benevolent interference of Pliny produced the most salutary effects to the government; and Trajan, (further enlightened by the works of St. Simeon, and touched by his courageous death,) stopped all persecution, and pardoned those, who, if in the eyes of contemporary orthodoxy, they erred in their spiritual belief, were proved to be innocent of the political and social crimes laid to their charge. To the good sense of Trajan, it appeared, that from a community in which two "servant maids were ministers," the empire had little (subversive of the throne

* History of the Church.

† The conduct of Pliny, full of wisdom and humanity, was still obliged to bend to the circumstances in which he was placed: and in this instance to yield to the ignorance and violence of the people: "but," says one of his best biographers and translators, "il gouverna les peuples en philosophe plein d'humanité, diminua les impots, rétablit la justice, et fit regner le bon ordre. Une persecution s'etant ailumée contre les chrétiens, Pline osa plaidre leur cause auprès de l'Empereur," &c.—*Sacy.*

and the altar) to fear.* The toleration of Trajan inspired so much veneration for his character, that, in future days of the Christian church (the inflexible enemy at all times of Pagan glory) the services of Trajan were remembered. Many writers, and among others, Paulus Diaconus, and St. John of Damascus, declared that the great Pope St. Gregory had obtained from heaven the salvation of the tolerant emperor, five centuries after his death!† May it also be hoped that the acknowledged power of Plotina over her warrior husband was not wholly forgotten; and that in the pious saint's "oraisons her sins (also) were remembered!"

While all merit is accorded to the mercy of Pliny, and to the justice of Trajan, the agency of Plotina silently but directly influenced the conduct of both. History has deigned to record, that her councils were given to Trajan, even at the frequent risk of his displeasure; and that, in many instances, she discovered the malversations of the most accredited of the governors of the remotest provinces, denounced them to the emperor, and by reiterated supplications induced him to replace the worthless with the worthy, the tyrannic with the just.‡ It was, probably, by her courageous advice, that Pliny (the friend of all the best

* On accusait les chrétiens d'etre conduits par un esprit de faction à renverser le trône et les autels, et par un système d'anarchie de vouloir etablir l'egalité sur les ruines de toutes les institutions.—*Segur, Abrégé de l'Histoire Universelle.*

† This absurd story, which is here introduced merely as displaying the opinion once prevalent in the church, concerning Trajan, is thus narrated. The Pope, in regarding Trajan's column, was struck by a bas-relief, representing him as descending from his horse, and pausing in his expedition to do justice by a widow, whose son had been slain; and thereupon, in his admiration of the pagan's charity, the saint prayed on the tomb of St. Peter, with such unction, for the emperor's soul, that he redeemed it from punishment. The Pope was informed in a dream of the success of his prayers, with an intimation not to perform the like good office in future, in favour of any one who had not been baptized. Of this fable, our ancestors, the Anglo-Saxons, were the inventors: and it was so confidently received, that Cardinal Baronius found himself obliged to refute it at considerable length.—*Bayle.*

‡ Plotine, ne craignant point déplaire, lorsque c'était l'avantage du peuple, avertissoit Trajan des malversations des gouverneurs de provinces. Ses conseils contribuèrent à la suppression de plusieurs abus. —*Histoire Abrégé des Abbés Brotier, de Saint Leger,* &c.

women in Rome, and the patron of many of the poorest) was sent to replace the persecuting proconsul of Bithynia and Pontus.

The close of the glorious reign of Trajan would have been happier, (if less brilliant,) for Rome and for the world, if the pacific councils of Plotina and of Plutarch had been acted on. But Trajan was a soldier; and his passion for military glory superseded, to the last, his wisdom and his discretion. "Nature," (he was wont to say,) "has destined me to bear arms, not to turn over books."

In the accomplishment of his vocation, he left Rome, at the head of a powerful army; and (having made an imperial progress into Africa, visited his native Spain, and rebuilt the pillars of Hercules,) he passed on into Asia, in the desire to attack the Parthians, and to obtain a glory denied to his predecessors—the glory of conquering the unconquered! Plotina, who could not dissuade, accompanied him in the perilous enterprise,—abandoning the luxurious magnificence of her Roman palace, for the privations of a camp, and once more buckling on the armour of heroism, with which, in early life, she had so long encountered the hardships and fatigues of a military life.

But both the emperor and herself were now advanced in years. Of the passions of Trajan, his ambition alone remained: the illusions of Plotina, too, may have passed away; but her affections were indestructible. She is recorded, however, as taking part in the campaigns in Armenia, Mesopotamia, Arabia Petræa, in the countries of the Euxine and the Caspian seas; in all which, Trajan, like another Cæsar, conquered—wherever "he came and saw."

Always at his side, Plotina passed the Tigris with him over a bridge of boats; and, following him across the Persian gulf, was present at his victory over "Araby the blessed." She heard him while, fanned by the voluptuous airs of the Isle of Ormuz, he planned his victories and lamented that "he was not young enough to trace the steps of Alexander into India:" but she heard him as forethoughtful woman listens to the ambitious dreams of

man, when the dream of life itself is hastening to its close.

After the battle of Mesopotamia, in which the Jews, who fought bravely, were almost exterminated, Trajan, who had already fallen into a state of mortal languor, was prevailed on to pass the winter in Syria, with the intention of going to Babylon in spring. He was perishing under the eyes of Plotina, who, worn out with fatigue, resolved to carry him back to Rome, by slow journeys: but when they arrived at Selenunta, in Cilicia, he was attacked with apoplexy, and died in the arms of the empress, in his sixty-fourth year, and the nineteenth of his reign.*

Seated by the dead body of her husband, in a strange land, with a restless army within view of the death-chamber of that great spirit, now so still, Plotina was surrounded by the ambitious intriguers of a court, the aspirants of no less a prize than an empire. Whether she was or was not aware of the uncertain projects of Trajan as to a successor, she resolved on giving him one, who, with sagacity to govern the empire, had the glory of having already defended it. Plotina, at this awful moment—the moment that intervenes between the conception and the attempting of a great and perilous deed, —presents a singular example of one of the most difficult and doubtful positions in which humanity can be placed.

If her design was awful, her decision was prompt, and its success triumphant and complete. Ere the secret of the emperor's death had transpired to the army, she had convinced the most powerful men about his person, that the emperor had adopted as his successor Adrian, the most brilliant and able of his generals. She had written to the senate to inform the conscript fathers of the adoption; and the senate, upon her word alone, accredited the fact. She presented the object of her choice to the Syrian legions, and they received him with acclamations at her hands; and, when the army of the East declared in his favour, Rome, the senate, and the people, assented to an

* A. D. 117.

authority, which it would have been in vain, had it been wise, to resist.*

Adrian, the countryman of Trajan, was, of all his generals, the one whom he had raised to the highest distinction, and whom he was said to have loved the least. Adrian was devoted to philosophy, literature, and to eloquence, as Trajan had been to war. Brilliant, polished, and jealous of the glory attained by others in the high intellectual career he had chosen for himself, he appeared to possess a character incompatible with the hardier qualities, and more soldierly and direct impressions of Trajan. But he had the good luck to attract the attention of Plotina by his literary genius, and to win her friendship by other talents more available to the state; and her credit with the emperor decided his fortunes.

Thus influenced, Plotina prevailed on Trajan to give Adrian his niece, Julia Sabina, in marriage, to name him prefect, and general-in-chief of the army; and (after his signal feats in the Parthian war,) to present him with that superb diamond, which he had himself received from Nerva, when chosen as his successor. Sustained by the protection of the empress, and by the utility of his own services, Adrian soon vanquished the prejudices of the emperor. His eloquence, and the talent with which he composed the speeches and letters of Trajan, rendered him as necessary in the closet as in the field; and the despatches of the soldier-emperor benefited by the pen of the most accomplished scholar of the day, who had also contributed to the glory of the achievements they recorded.

Many historians assert that Trajan, uncertain in his projects as to a successor, had first resolved to transmit his power to Servianus, and afterwards to Lusius, or, in fine, to Nervantius Priscus, a celebrated jurisconsult. But be that as it may, it is certain that, though Adrian deserved the throne of the empire, he owed it only to the friendship and arts of the empress Plotina.†

* Dion.—Segur.—Dodwell.

† "Plusieurs fois, il avoit montré le dessein de laisser le choix d'un empereur à la décision du sénat. Quoiqu'il en soit, il paraît certain, que

Few as are the historic fragments remaining of the reign of Trajan, a controversy as to the motives of the conduct of Plotina has been maintained, even to modern times. But there is sufficient evidence that, whatever that conduct may have been, the empire accepted without reluctance the emperor she gave it; that Adrian, the learned, the brave, and the peremptory, was the man wanting for the epoch, and that the choice of the empress in his favour perfectly accorded with the necessities of the times, the crowning motive of all sound policy.

Plotina, having calmed the effervescence of military restlessness, stifled the intrigues of a court faction, and thus for a while upheld and prolonged the great cause of peace and humanity, resigned herself to the melancholy luxury of her own woes, and to the performance of a duty, as sacred to the widow, as it was imperative on the empress.

She left Cilicia at the head of a military force, bearing in her arms the funeral urn which contained the ashes of her heroic husband. Another Agrippina, she was received in Rome like the immortal widow of Germanicus; and, followed by the mourning multitude of all classes, she proceeded to the forum of Trajan, and placed his remains within the pedestal* of that noble column, which was raised by the gratitude of Rome, in honour of the emperor's triumphs over the Dacians and other enemies of Rome. Pictured with many incidents of his prowess, which have been neglected by the historians of his own times, this monument is a record of inestimable value both to the artist and the antiquarian. Posterity, in gazing on its elaborate details, may add a tender interest to their admiration, when they recall the conjugal devotion of the great woman, who embalmed the site with her tears, as

si Adrien mérita l'empire par ses talens, il ne le dut qu' à l'amitié, et peut-être à l'artifice de Plotina."—*Segur.* See also Dion, Aurelius Victor, Gibbon, Dodwell, &c.

*."Il suddetto piedestallo é ornato di trofei di Aquile, e di guirlande fatte di foglie di quercia, ed è sì mirabilmente scolpito ed architettato, che viene considerato per il più bel piedestallo, che si possa immaginare."—*Vasi.*

she gazed on the sculptured story of her husband's prowess, and raised her eyes to the statue of him (which then crowned this noblest specimen of Roman art,) whose ashes she deposited amidst the trophies of his glory.*

Plotina, after the performance of this great duty, retired from public life. Adrian continued, during the remainder of her days, to acknowledge, in his adopted mother, the foundress of his own fortunes, and the true pacificator of the empire.† He nobly repaid the great benefits she had conferred on the public and on himself, by a reverence for her character almost religious; and by an affection for her person and society, which might have been deemed more than filial, if the character and age of the empress had not placed her beyond the possibility of suspicion. He continued to benefit by her great experience, he accepted her counsels, he authorized her imperial title of Augusta, and preserved her authority in the state, as in the time of Trajan.‡

The people and the senate considered her with equal respect and gratitude; and, though her advice and influence with Adrian, as with Trajan, contributed to the suppression of many public abuses, and to the exposure of many official malversations, (both among the great and the little,) yet her popularity prevailed over all private

* "E benchè questa colonna rimanesse nel recinto di Roma, ciò non ostante, per singolar privilegio, nel suo piedestallo vennero poste, entro un'urna d'oro, le ceneri di Trajano, che dall' Asia furono trasportate in Roma."—*Vasi.*

This noblest of all Roman columns, (the work of Apollodorus of Damascus,) corresponded in grandeur with the most spacious and magnificent of all the imperial Forums. Its bassi relievi, consisting of two thousand figures, besides the horses, elephants, and *materiel* of the Roman army, was long a school of art to the great master painters of Italy; and Raphael, Giulio Romano, Caravaggio, and others of their immortal confraternity, gave their days and nights to its contemplation. The statue of Trajan, of gilt bronze, was piously replaced, by Sixtus V., with the statue of St. Peter.

† Ce prince lui dut l'adoption que Trajan fit de lui, et par consequent l'empire; elle eut pour lui des sentimens qui ne passèrent point les bornes de la sagesse. Adrien toujours plein d'une tendre reconnaissance de ses services, lui conserva l'autorité qu'elle avait eu sous Trajan."—*Dictionnaire Universelle,* &c.

‡ A. D. 129.

pique and personal resentment. Based on her public services, it lasted during her prolonged life; and at her death it raised her to the rank of the gods themselves.

Notwithstanding these merits the historical eulogist of her husband's reign, allowed no place in the studied paragraphs of his eloquent flattery, to her whose mind and character stamped the age in which she lived with the great seal of civilizing humanity: but the Roman public, more just than the courtly historiographer of "the father of his country," raised a temple* to the honour of "the mother of the people"—a temple, in which her memory and mediation were long invoked by the sacred style of Plotina Diva.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Women of the Empire. Julia Sabina. Galeria Faustina. Annia Faustina.

At the death of Trajan, the fortunes of Rome demanded a great prince; and history has amply recorded, that the Emperor Adrian well merited the title. He gave to the empire one of its longest intervals of prosperity and peace;

* If the remains of this temple be ever sought by some tasteful and enterprising woman, (like her, whose munificence gave to the antiquarian world of Europe one great monument more of imperfectiy recorded times,†) they will probably be found near the Forum of Trajan, the site of the temple raised to the divinity of her husband, and not far from the spot where some ruins have already been discovered, of the Ulpian library, and the imperial palace: but it is not unlikely that the site once dedicated to the virtues of this pagan empress may now be consecrated by the two beautiful Christian temples, elevated in the name, and to the divinity of another deified woman: for, over the ruins of the *Foro Trajano* now stand the churches of *Santa Maria*, and of *Santa Maria di Loretto*.

† The late Duchess of Devonshire, who brought to light the column of Phocas.

he rendered the people happy by a wise and just administration;* and his love of letters, of science, and of arts, affixed the seal of intellectuality to his reign of twenty-one years, upholding for a time the cause of civilisation which the virtues of his immediate predecessors had favoured.†

Yet this great prince was the reverse of a great man, and still less of a good one! The private vices of Adrian, gradually developed by the increasing facility of their indulgence, soon balanced the influence of his political virtues in public opinion; and if, in the first years of his great reign, even truth compared him to Augustus, posterity has detected in his last years a not unfounded parallel with Nero. His policy and wisdom, had, indeed, dictated the humane expediency of religious toleration;‡ "and his vast and active genius was alike suited to the most enlarged views, and to the most minute details of civil policy:"§ but inordinate vanity overshadowed his higher qualities;

* Adrian gave stability to jurisprudence by a code, which prevented all variations of the text, and captious interpretations of corrupt prætors.

† The remains of the emperor's public monuments still attest the grandeur of his designs. The Mola of Adrian, the modern Castle St. Angelo, is now the Citadel of Rome; and its vaults still exist in all the perfection of their primitive construction. The traveller still wanders, likewise, with interest over the ruins of his palace and gardens, among the classic miracles of Tivoli, which once contained a mimic representation of all the most renowned sites and places in the then known world. At Nimes, "les arenès et le pont du garde ont traversés les siècles, et resistent encor aux outrages du tems."

‡ In his quality of poet and ideologist, Adrian was a professed admirer of the ritual of the Greeks; and he was one of the few emperors, who, in assuming the honours of the sovereign pontificate, celebrated its functions with zeal and solemnity. A free inquirer into all religions, he was so tolerant to Christianity that it was suspected that some of the beautiful temples he had constructed in the East were intended to be dedicated to Christ. He displayed much moderation towards the new religionists, protected them by laws, and ordered the punishment of their calumniators.

§ Always merciful to the people, he softened the miseries of slavery, by abolishing the horrid custom of putting all slaves to death whose masters were assassinated. He was the first also to forbid the sale of unfortunate women in the marts of vice; and it is a curious trait of the times, and of the state of the capital of the world, that, notwithstanding its forums, its palaces, and magnificent public monuments, the streets were so narrow, that he forbade horsemen riding, and carts and heavy equipages passing through them, in an anxiety to save the lives of his subjects, which were endangered by the practice.

"the ruling passion of his soul" betrayed him into all the littleness of the meaner vices of humanity; and many of his private faults, like the worst of his public crimes, were attributable to the lowest, as it is the most relentless of passions,—envy.

The imperial artist and poet was inexorable to contemporary genius; and the politic prince, who so often showed clemency to those who attacked his life, could not pardon those who wounded his self-love.* The admirer of talents was jealous of the talented, and his friendship for superior merit, became, in the end, more dangerous than his indifference and neglect. Always great before the world, and little at home, Adrian abolished polygamy in his remotest colonies;† while he converted his exquisite villa at Tivoli, his "grotto of the sirens,"‡ into a temple of licentious pleasure. By his disgusting profligacy, and his cruel neglect, he drove his wife, Julia Sabina, upon the dangerous expedient of a culpable revenge; and, by his continued unmanly persecution, he urged her upon self-destruction.§

Adrian, one of the greatest of Roman emperors, died in his vocation of the vainest of men;‖ nor has the vanity

* Illustrated in his conduct to Apollodorus, the architect, whose criticism on a work of the emperor's cost him his life.

† In Britain, where, during his residence, he reformed the laws and morals of the people; and where he "advanced civilisation by rendering the ties of matrimony more sacred, and abolishing by a public edict the universal polygamy which he found prevailing there."—*Universal History, Ancient and Modern.*

‡ Among the remains of the gardens of Adrian, there is shown La grotta delle Serene, "orribile ma delizziosa grotta,"—says the modern cicerone.

§ The treatment which this imperial husband afforded to the niece of his benefactor, has not been without its parallel in modern times. He set spies about the empress to watch her conduct, and "his curiosity led him to intercept and read all her letters." He even succeeded in turning the patrician fashion of Rome against her in her own court; and, after the death of her aunt Plotina, (for whom his gratitude, "etait le seul de ses sentiments qui ne se démentit jamais,") he overwhelmed Sabina with his contempt and calumny; "engaging," says an elegant historian of his reign, "les personnes de sa cour à lui faire éprouver les plus sanglantes mortifications, et la maltraita tellement qu'elle finit par se donner la mort."

‖ Making pretty verses for the admiration of the literary coteries of the Aventine, which have reached posterity.

of the women of his own, or any other age, been characterized by a cruel and reckless rivalry, like that which put Appollodorus to death, and which denied the merits of Homer, Cicero, and Sallust.

These incoherencies in the life of this illustrious sovereign, but most fallible man, rendered the senate doubtful, after his death, whether to pronounce him a god or a tyrant. The last and wisest act of his reign was his adoption of Antonine as his successor; and he thus, in consulting the happiness of his people, accomplished the wish of the Greek sage, by "seating philosophy on the throne of the world." The characters and government of these two illustrious men justified their election; for their reigns constituted that portion of the Roman empire, during which the condition of the human race was most bright and prosperous.

History, it might be thought, was only written for the preservation of great events and great names. The historians of the people, the chroniclers of private life, are few and incidental; and fewest in a state of society, like that of the silver age of the Roman empire. Contemporary romance, likewise, preserves no details of the domestic life of those times, nor founds its fables upon facts displaying the characteristic combinations of reality. The Roman satirists of the second century pounced, indeed, upon the frailties of contemporary women, to supply themselves with subject matter for their satires. But these they found most marked in the highest classes of society; and, in exposing them with a rancorous garrulity which modern Juvenals have never surpassed, they do not seem to have troubled themselves much about the authenticity of their anecdotes.

Although history has unavoidably or accidentally preserved the great deeds of great women, along with the records of their foibles, the milder, but not less influential virtues and talents of the women of private life have therefore escaped utter oblivion, only in rare instances, and through the eminence and celebrity of the men with whom they were associated. The women of the families of Pliny, and of his preceptor, Quinctilian, whose virtues were thus

recorded, were probably examples, rather than exceptions, to the general state of that class of female society in Rome, of which the court and its satirical historiographers and journalists took no cognizance.

In the middle classes of all ages and countries, the unostentatious, domestic virtues have existed in the greatest intensity; nor can it reasonably be doubted that Rome itself must have perished and disappeared, if the city had faithfully reflected the vices of the court and the patrician.

It was not, however, from the humbler classes of society, that the imperial successors of Adrian chose their wives. Titus Antoninus Pius, "the praised in all languages," "the second Numa," ("for the same love of religion, justice, and peace, was the distinguishing characteristic of both princes"*)—who "diffused order and tranquillity over the greatest part of the earth—who enjoyed with moderation the elevation of his fortunes, and united them with the innocent pleasures of society"—Antoninus Pius married, while yet a private Roman citizen, Galeria Faustina, the daughter of Annius Verus, prefect of Rome, a woman who is said to have added, to the splendour of an illustrious birth, a person the most faultless, and a wit the most polished and insinuating.

In the garbled history of the Roman empresses, the frailties of the Empress Galeria Faustina form a dark item! But the wisest of sovereigns, and most pious of men —(he who is cited as a model of domestic virtue)—loved Faustina, with constancy and confidence, during her life; and raised temples to her virtues, and altars to her divinity, after her death. Among the beautiful medals extant of this reign, which still fix the glance of admiring *virtu*, there is one which represents Antoninus Pius on one side, and, on the reverse, Faustina ascending to heaven, with a lighted torch, under the figure of Diana;* an evidence

* Plutarch.

† Another medal of Faustina, in the Cabinet du Roi, at Paris (discovered by the Baron Spanheim), is thus described:—"Ce beau médaillon représente, d'un coté Antonin, et de l'autre la consécration de Faustina, sous un type assez rare de cette nouvelle Déesse, portée au ciel à demi voilée, non sur un aigle—mais sur un Pegase."—*Commentaire de Spanheim, &c.*

at least of the faith of Antoninus in the virtues of his wife offered at the tribunal of contemporary public opinion.

"Without the help of medals and inscriptions," says Gibbon, "we should be ignorant of some of the facts most honourable to the memory of Pius;" and it is equally true that Faustina, in more than one instance, stands indebted to the imitative arts of her time, for her justification against the libels of malignant writers, both of ancient and of modern times.

In all ages the union of wit and beauty in woman has been reluctantly and rarely pardoned by her masters; and though female dulness (when profligate and pretty) is permitted, unreproached, to found its fortunes on its frailties, yet the success of higher endowments never fails to alarm the self-love of the self-sufficient pretenders to fame of both sexes —and, above all, of the small dealers in the trade of literary defamation, with whom envy is in alliance with cupidity. To the contraband traffic of the literary libeller, the times of Adrian and the Antonines were favourable. Like society itself, literature had fallen into a state of decadence; the name of poet was almost forgotten; and that of orator was usurped by sophists: a cloud of critics, of compilers, and of commentators, darkened the face of learning; and the decline of genius was fast followed by the corruption of taste.*

Annia Faustina, the daughter of Galeria Faustina and of Antoninus Pius, inherited her mother's beauty,† her

While the name of Faustina is writing on this page, one of her coins lies beside it, on which her exquisitely chiselled image bears testimony to that character of intellectual beauty, which may have entitled her to ascend to the Olympian Parnassus—"non sur un aigle—mais sur un Pegase."

* "If we except the inimitable Lucian, this age of indolence passed away without having produced a single writer of original genius."—*Gibbon*, vol. i.

† To judge from her portrait, her beauty, less perfect than her mother's, must have been not less attractive. "Elle avait" (says a French translator) "de l'esprit et les graces, la tête petite, le visage un peu avancé, le cou long, et les yeux petits, mais fort vifs, et toutes les saillies de l'etourderie." Her head-dress is precisely that in vogue at the present moment; and her features bear a striking resemblance to those of the sisters of Napoleon.

wit, her elevated fortunes, and more than the reputation of her imputed gallantries. She was, however, the chosen wife of Marcus Aurelius, called "the philosopher." Antoninus Pius, (although he had two sons), had, with his invariable wisdom and virtue, preferred the welfare of Rome to the interest of his family; and he gave his daughter Faustina in marriage to his young colleague, Marcus, whom he had raised while a youth to proconsular power; "with a noble disdain, or rather ignorance, of jealousy, associating him in all the labours of government."

The united reigns of the illustrious husbands of the two Faustinas (says Gibbon) "are possibly the only periods of history, in which the happiness of a great people was the sole object of the government. During the twenty-three years of the reign of Pius, Marcus, his son-in-law, is reported to have been only two nights absent from the palace; and even these were at different periods,"*—an instance of domestic habits scarcely to be paralleled even in modern times, among the club-husbands of "the most domestic and moral country under heaven."

"When the love of letters, inseparable from peace and refinement," and so fashionable in the court of the Antonines, is called to mind, and when the studious and elegant tastes of the philosophic emperors, and the wit and beauty of their wives, are taken into the picture of their domestic lives, it is difficult to imagine a more charming idea of elegant and happy domesticity, united to all the luxuries and enjoyments of an imperial magnificence. The conjugal happiness of Antoninus Pius may, therefore, be taken as reflected in the married life of his wise successor and son-in-law.† It appears, indeed, on the evidence of history, that "Marcus Aurelius lived with Julia Faustina on terms of the most perfect esteem and confidence; and, during a connexion of thirty years, he invariably gave her

* Hist. August. p. 25.

† Gibbon. The two Antonines governed the Roman world forty-two years, A. D. 138–180. Julia Faustina died only five years before her illustrious husband, 175; so that they must have grown old together. After her death he retired from public life.

proofs of the most tender confidence, and of a respect which ended not with her life." In his "Meditations," he "thanks the gods who had bestowed on him a wife so faithful, so gentle, and of such wonderful simplicity of manners." The obsequious senate at his earliest request declared her a goddess. She was represented in her temple, with the attributes of Juno, Venus, and Ceres; and "it was decreed that on the day of their nuptials, the youth of either sex should pay their vows before the altars of their chaste patroness."*

Thirty years! what an epoch in married life—in life itself—what an intimate observation must it have afforded! what comparative views, what conclusive evidence, what irrefragable proofs, by which to have tested the conduct, the character, and the actions of an intimate friend and associate, thus ever present, in youth, maturity, and age, to the hourly observation of one of the wisest and most moral men of antiquity! With such experience, it is morally impossible that Marcus could have been deceived in the character of his wife; and still more so, that, after her decease, he should have sanctioned her vice in the eyes of a laughing world, by a solemn act, tantamount to the canonization of modern times. Still, in opposition to this testimony of Marcus Au[illegible]us, the philosopher, his wife, the adored and deified Julia Faustina, is handed down to the remotest posterity, as a woman of unbounded levity and immorality.†

But, such as she was, Faustina held a boundless influence over the heart of her husband—an influence, be it

* Notwithstanding the sneer of the bachelor historian of the decline and fall, the Roman public long celebrated the fêtes which were instituted in the honour of Faustina; and a venerable priesthood burnt incense on her altars. She was further surnamed Mater Castrorum, on the occasion of her visiting the camp, at a time when an abundance of rain fell to relieve the Roman army, which was perishing with drought.

† "Capitolin nous affirme que l'Imperatrice gardait si peu de ménagement, qu'un jour Marc Aurele la surprit dinant tête-à-tête avec Tertullius, *Tertullium etiam prandentem cum uxore deprehendit*," a detection, which, whether true or false, recalls the supper of Mary Stuart and Rizzio, which, in another age, served the purposes of faction, and was its excuse for murder.

observed, so coincident with his refined tastes, his justice, and his humanity, that not one act of cruelty, or meanness, was perpetrated through the perversion of her passions, or the abuse of her power, to cloud the mild glories of that reign, during which "the vast extent of the Roman empire was governed by absolute power, under the guidance of wisdom and virtue." The contemporary witnesses of the private life of Marcus Aurelius were all in his favour; his memory, says the historian, "was revered by a grateful posterity; and many persons preserved his image among those of their household gods."

If such were the husbands, it is little likely that both should have tolerated the vices imputed to their wives. In recording, therefore, the frailties of Faustina, and scoffing at the credulity* of Marcus Aurelius, may not faction have borrowed the stylus of history, and calumny pranked its falsehoods in the colouring of truth?—may not the bitter spirit and disappointed views, which dictated "the complaints" of the ambitious Avidius Cassius, have served the purposes of the enemies of Marcus;† and may not the slander of neglected wits and rival beauties have exaggerated the faults, or invented the vices of Faustina? For when has faction paused ere it struck, or inquired ere it crushed?—or when has even [illegible]h rank elevated a naturally sordid and vulgar mind, above the barter of character and consideration, if personal interests were to be forwarded, or personal pique gratified?‡ May not some

* "The world," (says Gibbon, with the chuckle of a célibataire) "the world has laughed at the credulity of Marcus, but Madame Dacier assures us (and we may credit a lady) that the husband will always be deceived, if the wife condescends to deceive"—(*Decline and Fall*, &c.)—an admission rather in favour of the cleverness of woman, than of the judgment of her master.

† "The enemies of Marcus charged him with hypocrisy, and with a want of that simplicity which distinguished Pius, and even Verus. This suspicion, unjust as it was, may serve to account for the superior applause bestowed upon personal qualifications, in preference to the social virtues."—*Gibbon*.

‡ The chivalry of French literature (when literature was chivalrous in France) undertook the defence of Annia Faustina, and one amusing and learned dissertation appeared on the subject in the *Mercure de France*, 1745, by Jaques Marchand.

discarded freed woman of the beautiful and whimsical Julia Faustina, some well paid and pampered minion of the imperial toilet, have repaid the accumulated benefits of her august mistress by slander and treachery; and, coining for present purposes her gossipry into drachmes, have supplied future historians with such ignoble details, as furnished forth the historic "dreams" of Dion Cassius* and the flippant satires of Julian the Apostate?†

CHAPTER IX.

The Women of the Empire. Fadilla. Marcia. Lucilla. The Empress Crispina.

THE accession of Commodus to the throne of his father, amidst the acclamations of the senate and the armies, was an event the most disastrous for Rome and for humanity. For, though Commodus was not, perhaps, a "tiger let

* Dion Cassius, by birth a Bithynian, was ten years in Rome, collecting anecdotes and traditions for his "memoirs," and for his "history," which he wrote, according to his own account, in consequence of a dream. The monster Commodus his patron, he said, appeared to him and ordered him to execute it. In haunting the marble porticos, the boudoirs of the decayed courtiers and faded beauties of "La vielle Cour," of the reigning emperor's father and mother, it is no stretch of the imagination to suppose that he may have picked up many of his details from the survivors of the ladies of the household of Julia Faustina. A modern French critic, in tracing, in the clearness of his style, an imitation of Thucydides, accuses him of being "credule, superstitieux, bizarre, partiel, et également porté à la flatterie et à la satire." It is enough to add, that he defamed Cicero, and decried Brutus.

† The deification of Faustina is the only defect which Julian's criticism is able to discover in all the accomplished character of Marcus. See his Satires on the Cæsars. Yet Julian owed his own elevation to the throne of the empire to the wisdom and influence of a woman, Eusebia, the wife of Constance. The temple of Antoninus and Faustina, the modern custom-house of Rome, is an additional evidence to character. The coupling of husband and wife in a common worship, after their death, would have been too cutting a sarcasm, had the scandals afterwards current been then seriously believed.

loose, with an insatiate thirst for human blood, and capable from his infancy of the most inhuman actions," he had within him the sources of the darkest crimes, and most degrading vices,—that defective organization which neither feels nor sympathizes,—and that feebleness of will, which leaves its possessor a prey to the corrupt, and a mimic follower of the vicious. "But his cruelty, which at first obeyed the dictates of others, degenerated into habit; and at length became the ruling passion of his soul." His hatred to the senate and all good men; his murder of the wise and innocent Quinctilians, (brothers,) and of his own corrupt favourite and minister, Perennis; his utter neglect of the affairs and interests of the empire, whilst he indulged in every vice, and "lived immersed in blood and luxury;" his rapacity, his avarice, and dissolute pleasures, which outraged the honour and happiness of the highest families; his love of the most brutal sports of the lowest of the people; his passion for hunting wild beasts, and the fearful and disgusting scenes in which the imperial gladiator passed his days,—are all rapidly passed over by the decency of modern historians; and, for the dignity of human nature, and the interests of society, they might best be forgotten, were they not necessary to account for the awful demoralization of the society of Rome at this disgusting epoch.

The women were, as usual, the greatest sufferers by such prevalent corruption. The seraglio of the imperial palace rarely contained less than three hundred victims, the flower of the female beauty of the empire, which the arts of seduction, or the brute violence of an illimitable power, readily procured. But the women, however corrupted and outraged, were not always passive: their energies did not sleep with their virtue; they mingled in many of the most important political intrigues of the time, and shared the disgusts and fears of the senate and the people. They also came forth occasionally in the characteristic humanity of their sex; and, upon one occasion, they saved even the life of the monster who oppressed them.

When pestilence and famine were contributing to fill up

the calamities of Rome, and the popular discontents were embittered by a monopoly of corn, which was supported by the power of a base and corrupt minister, the people, (by one of those abrupt, and sometimes unaccountable impulsions, by which masses are simultaneously moved,) suddenly rushed from the circus, where they had been enjoying some public amusements, and proceeded to one of the delicious imperial villas in the suburbs, (a favourite retreat of the emperor's,) where, with tumultuous clamours, they demanded the head of the favourite.

"Cleander, who commanded the Prætorian guards, ordered a body of cavalry to sally forth, and disperse the seditious multitude. The multitude fled with precipitation towards the city; several were slain, and many more were trampled to death: but, when the cavalry entered the streets, their pursuit was checked by a shower of stones and darts from the roofs and windows of the houses. The foot-guards, who had been long jealous of the prerogatives and insolence of the Prætorian cavalry, embraced the party of the people. The tumult became a regular engagement, and threatened a general massacre.

"The Prætorians at length gave way oppressed with numbers; and the tide of popular fury returned with redoubled violence against the gates of the palace, where Commodus lay, dissolved in luxury, and alone unconscious of the civil war. It was death to approach his person with the unwelcome news; and he would have perished in this supine security, had not two women, his elder sister Fadilla, and Marcia, the most favoured of his concubines, ventured to break into his presence. Bathed in tears, and with dishevelled hair, they threw themselves at his feet; and, with all the pressing eloquence of fear, discovered to the affrighted emperor the crimes of the minister, the rage of the people, and the impending ruin which, in a few minutes, would burst over his palace and person. Commodus, thus startled from his dream of pleasure, commanded that the head of Cleander should be thrown out to the people."*

* Gibbon's Roman Empire, vol. i. chap. 4.

The desired spectacle instantly appeased the tumult; and the son of Marcus might even yet have regained the affection and confidence of his subjects, if the counsels of Fadilla and Marcia had been listened to. Commodus thus owed his life to the sex he had outraged, and to the protection of those natural affections, which the most amiable of his sisters, and the most devoted of his mistresses, still preserved for him.

But Commodus had another sister, of a far other temperament and character, than that of the gentle and humane Fadilla—Lucilla, the favourite daughter of Marcus Aurelius, whom he had educated under his own eye, and in his own philosophy, and to whose young mind he is said to have given high motives, noble sentiments, and a love for all the virtues. Lucilla, thus educated, was married at seventeen to the brave and beautiful, but most profligate voluptuary, Lucius Verus. She was sent from Rome to Syria, (where Lucius commanded the army,) for the celebration of the nuptials; and in the height of the war against the Armenians and Parthians, Verus, (then Cæsar,) came to Ephesus, to receive his young and beautiful bride, and to wed her with all the magnificent ceremonial of an imperial marriage.

Lucilla, intelligent and passionate,* (described by all writers as the inheritress of her mother's charms and her grandmother's wit,) fell deeply in love with the husband, whom state policy had given her; and if that love had been returned, might have lived honoured and died deified. But Lucius, vain, faithless, and dissolute, repaid her devotion, first with indifference, then with neglect; while he disgusted her natural and enthusiastic affection, by a dissolute libertinism, which the defective moral feeling of the man took no precaution to conceal.

The "hatred of a woman scorned" acted upon the vehement temperament and impressionable character of

* "Lucille, belle, bien faite, et très spirituelle, méritait un mari moins corrompu que Verus: ayant trouvé ce prince plongé dans les debauches les plus infames, elle s'en degouta."—*Biogr. Univers.*

Lucilla with commensurate violence: but it was not till long after her return from Syria to Rome, that some personal insults on the part of her husband, and some dark suspicions of his guilty preference for her own sister, drove her to the fullest indulgence of her violent temper, which left her the sport of excited and bitter feelings, until, becoming frail herself, she pointed her accusations against all who awakened her jealousy, or discovered her misconduct.

The death of her husband, the man she had most loved and most hated, (whose portrait, busts, and statues, still attest the personal beauty which was the ultimate cause of his greatness, and of his crimes,) restored Lucilla to that mental equanimity, for which she was remarkable in her maiden days; but, still docile to the direction of her illustrious father, she accepted from his hands a husband the reverse of Lucius. Paulus Pompeianus was the most distinguished of the Roman senators, and one of the most virtuous and noble of Roman citizens.* But he was of an advanced age, of studious and philosophic habits, and of severe and reserved manners. Lucilla, who married him against her wishes and her will, lived with him without confidence or affection; and she stands accused of the ruling vice of the age, as it was of the court of her infamous and brutal brother, the vice which, in the refinement of modern parlance, gives to its female professors the modified epithet of "femmes galantes."

The gifted but perverted Lucilla, as time faded the lustre of her beauty, and lessened the number of her admirers, gave herself up to political intrigues; and she formed a powerful faction in her brother's court. Among other motives assigned for her conduct, the indignities heaped on her by the reigning empress, Crispina, are said, by the most eminent of modern historians, to have been not the least influential.

The personal pretensions, the jealousies, and the gal-

* The virtuous husband of Lucilla was the only senator who asserted the honour of his rank, during the reign of Commodus.

lantries of these two great ladies, had long added to the disorders of the imperial court; and, under the sanguinary dispensations of their common and ferocious master, their agitated and restless lives terminated in the cruel and violent death of both. The unfortunate empress, detected in an illicit amour, by a husband to whom no vice however disgusting, no crime however atrocious, was unknown, was banished to the island of Caprea, where, having occupied the throne of the Cæsars for three years, she was put to death by the command of her husband, in the bloom of her youth and life.*

The assumed cause of the death of Lucilla was a crime of a darker dye. "One evening, as the emperor was returning to the palace through a dark and narrow portico in the amphitheatre, an assassin, who waited his passage, rushed upon him with a drawn sword, loudly exclaiming: 'The senate sends you this!' The menace prevented the deed; the assassin was seized by the guards, and immediately revealed the authors of the conspiracy."

This plot had been formed, not in the state, but within the walls of the palace. "Lucilla, the emperor's sister, impatient of the second rank, and jealous of the reigning empress, had armed the murderer against her brother's life. She had not ventured to communicate the black design to her second husband, Claudius Pompeianus; but, among the crowd of her lovers, she found men of desperate fortunes and wild ambition, who were prepared to serve her more violent as well as her tender passions. The conspirators experienced the rigour of justice, and the abandoned princess was punished, first with exile, and afterwards with death."†

When the antecedents of this "abandoned princess" are taken into consideration, her crimes, though never to be excused, are perfectly explained; and the interval, which

* Bruttia Crispina Augusta, daughter of the Consul Bruttius Præsens, is described as having a graceful person and a susceptible heart; but there is no medal extant of her; she was put to death by Commodus, A. D. 183, and was scarcely three years married.

† Gibbon's Roman Hist. vol. i. chap. xii.

occurred between the epoch, when the innocent and intelligent girl sat at her father's feet, (imbibing that philosophy which gave him his immortality,) and the awful moment when she submitted to the hands of the executioner, may have been filled up by sad and fearful details, which charity would accept as qualifying clauses, in favour of one so gifted and so unfortunate, though so criminal.

Commodus survived his victims ten years; and what remained to be told of the horrible life and reign of the murderer of his wife and sister, as far as relates to the influence of the women of his time, seems more impartially related by the eloquent historian, to whose authority this page in the story of Roman women stands so deeply indebted.

"Commodus had now attained the summit of vice and infamy. Amidst the acclamations of a flattering court, he was unable to disguise from himself that he had deserved the contempt and hatred of every man of sense and virtue in his empire. His ferocious spirit was irritated by the consciousness of that hatred, by the envy of every kind of merit, by the just apprehension of danger, and by the habit of slaughter which he contracted in his daily amusements.

"History has preserved a long list of consular senators sacrificed to his wanton suspicion, which sought out with peculiar anxiety those unfortunate persons connected, however remotely, with the family of the Antonines, without sparing even the ministers of his crimes or pleasures. His cruelty proved at last fatal to himself. He had shed with impunity the noblest blood of Rome: he perished as soon as he was dreaded by his own domestics. Marcia, his favourite concubine, Eclectus his chamberlain, and Laetus his Prætorian prefect, alarmed by the fate of their companions and predecessors, resolved to prevent the destruction which every hour hung over their heads, either from the mad caprice of the tyrant, or the sudden indignation of the people.

"Marcia* seized the occasion of presenting a draught of wine to her lover, after he had fatigued himself with hunting some wild beasts. Commodus retired to sleep; but, whilst he was labouring with the effects of poison and drunkenness, a robust youth, by profession a wrestler, entered his chamber, and strangled him without resistance. The body was secretly conveyed out of the palace, before the least suspicion was entertained in the city, or even in the court of the emperor's death.

"Such was the fate of the son of Marcus; and so easy was it to destroy a hated tyrant, who, by the artificial powers of government had oppressed during thirteen years so many millions of subjects, each of whom was equal to their master in personal strength, and in personal abilities."†

The fall of this young monster-master of Rome and of its empire, like that of those who had preceded, and had resembled him in crime and power, brought with it the usual political moral. The most absolute monarchy has always to dread the caprices, if not the reason of a nation of slaves; and, from the Cæsars to the Czars, despots have been for ever taught, but taught in vain, that power loses in safety and security, what it gains by force and irresponsibility.

Amidst all the crimes and vices of the reign of Commodus, one strange solecism, characterized by mercy and policy, occurs to astound posterity: the great reforming medium of the age was unrepressed—Christianity was respected, and the Christians were released from persecution. No reason has been assigned for this political anomaly, except that a woman, (the only woman who ever made Commodus feel he had a heart,) interfered in their behalf,

* Marcia, Laetus, and Eclectus, the first officer of the palace, had in vain endeavoured to persuade the emperor to revoke an order he had issued to massacre all the spectators in the theatre on a particular day. He drove them from him with menaces, and wrote an order for their death. A child left in the room with Commodus picked up the fatal list as it fell from his hands while he slept, and carried it to Marcia, who showed it to Laetus and Eclectus.

† Gibbon's Roman Hist. vol. i. chap. iv.

and gave them her protection. Marcia was a Christian;* and she who committed an act, which Pagan patriotism deified in Brutus, but which Christian ethics must condemn, saved millions of lives by her influential interference; and proved that humanity, not cruelty, had urged her to participate in a deed, by which the world was released from the sway of a tyrant and a monster.†

CHAPTER X.

The Women of the Empire. The Empress Julia Domna.

It was the good fortune of the conspirators, who, in preserving their own lives, had for a time, saved Rome, that they were enabled to justify their actions, by giving to the empire a master worthy to succeed to the wise and illustrious Antoninus, and capable, by his well-known virtue and experience, of healing the wounds inflicted by the frantic cruelty of Commodus.

The people and the senate, on learning the death of him who had oppressed and tortured them for thirteen years resigned themselves to transports of joy, and loudly approved the successor, who had been chosen for them. Pertinax, (taken from his bed in the middle of the night to ascend the throne of the world,) mistook his election for the execution of a death-warrant. He was the son of a

* "Sous ce regne infâme, on voit avec surprise que les chrétiens ne furent pas persecutés: on prétende qu'ils étaient protegés par Marcia, celle de toutes ses maîtresses qui avait pris le plus d'empire sur son esprit."—*Segur.*

† "Il (Commodus) vendait des arrêts de mort, les scelerats s'adressant à lui avec confiance, pour les délivrer de leurs ennemis. Surpassant de délire Neron et Caligula, il fit couper les bras aux prêtres de Bellona, parceque, cette Déesse était représentée mutilée: il sacrifia des hommes a Mithra," &c.—*Segur.*

timber-merchant in Piedmont; and had reached the highest rank in the state, by his virtues and his talents. In all his great employments, military as well as civil, he had uniformly distinguished himself by the firmness, the prudence, and the integrity of his conduct.

On his accession to the throne, Pertinax refused to flatter the vanity of his wife with the title of Augusta, or to "corrupt the inexperienced youth of his son by giving him the rank of Cæsar." He settled, however, on them the whole of his private fortune, that they might have no pretence to solicit favours from the state. In private life, he had lived with the most virtuous and enlightened of the senate; and when raised to the throne, he received them into his intimate society, and invited them to those familiar entertainments, which were ridiculed for their frugality, by such as had shared the orgies, and regretted the luxurious prodigality of Commodus.

Dion Cassius, in his history, speaks of these family parties and imperial conversazioni, like "a senator who supped with the emperor;" while Capitolinus (one of the literary gleaners who, in all times, haunt the houses of the great, and live on the sweepings of society) writes on the same subject,* "like a slave who had received his intelligence from one of the scullions;" but posterity is at no loss to decide between them. The new emperor desired to reform the state, and to remit a portion of the oppressive taxes invented by Commodus: and by this frugality, he set the example of public economy, and at the same time reduced the expenses of the imperial household one half.

Pertinax, it is related, exposed to public auction the instruments of luxury, the gold and silver plate, a superfluous wardrobe of silk and embroidery, and a great number of beautiful slaves, of both sexes; excepting only such as had been born in a state of freedom, and forcibly taken from the arms of their parents. "At the same time that he obliged the worthless favourites of the tyrant to resign a part of their ill-gotten wealth, he satisfied the just

* Gibbon.—Capitolinus. Hist. August.

creditors of the state, and unexpectedly discharged the *long* arrears of honest services."*

Rome, socially speaking, was not in a state to bear such rapid reforms, as, having the welfare of the many for their object, uncompromisingly infringed on the luxuries and the privileges of the few. All, indeed, who still retained some principle of patriotism, to whatever grades and classes they might belong, revered Pertinax for his justice, his wisdom, and his beneficence, as well as for the moral courage with which he opposed the corruption of the times; but these were a small minority. The corrupt, the ignorant and the prejudiced, who branded with the names of innovation and democracy those salutary changes, and humane restrictions, which could alone save society from utter dissolution, were masters of its fate. The faction which had so long supported Commodus in his infamy and tyranny, accordingly resolved upon the destruction of the reforming emperor. In this conspiracy were united the Prætorians (who hated an emperor that permitted neither rapine nor license), and a party of malecontents, composed of corrupt slaves, freedmen, courtezans, and informers; together with the debauchees of patrician rank, and whatever was most cowardly and corrupt in the senate, or despised and abhorred in the court.

The assassination of Pertinax was the result. The soldiers surrounded him in his palace when he was alone and unarmed. He received them with firmness; and the noble appeal he made to their judgment, for a time suspended their intention, while, trembling and uncertain, they stood in his presence with eyes cast down and swords half sheathed. But when at length a savage German soldier struck the emperor with his lance on the head, his comrades in cowardice followed up the blow; and Pertinax, yielding to the brute force of the murderers, enveloped his venerable head in his toga, and invoking Jupiter the avenger, fell to the earth, covered with wounds.†

It was remarkable that one only of the officers of the palace came to his defence. This was Eclectus, who had

* Gibbon. † After a reign of three months. A. D. 192.

placed him on the throne; and who, defending the emperor against his murderers, fell dead at his feet.

In a reign so short, there was little room for female intervention, either in good or in evil; but the widow of Pertinax, the empress of three months, evinced her worthiness and elevation of mind, by retiring at once to her original privacy, rejecting all honours, and refusing all solace. Her only son, following in her steps, made no pretensions to a throne stained with the blood of his father, and with that of so many of his predecessors.

From the death of Pertinax, Rome ceased for a time to have laws and government, while the sword, which gave power, took it away at pleasure; and the Prætorian cohorts, from the heights of their ramparts, put up the empire publicly for sale to the highest bidder. It was knocked down to Didius Julianus, a vain, weak, old man, by profession a jurisconsult; and by the force of accumulation, the richest citizen in Rome. Julianus, to gratify the vengeance of the Prætorians, stopped at no crime; and, to please the partisans of Commodus, he drew from her retreat the once influential and heroic Marcia, who was instantly put to death—an offering to the manes of Commodus. Julianus survived the victim of his pitiful and cruel expediency but a few weeks: he was murdered by his own guards; and his wife and daughter saved their lives only by the resignation of their wealth and titles, and an immediate retreat into an undisturbed oblivion.

The right of might, exemplified by the power of the Prætorians, ("whose licentious fury was the first symptom and cause of the decline of the Roman empire,") resumed its barbarous prerogative over the civilized world. The armies of Britain, Syria, and Pannonia, caught the public discontents of Rome, on the remotest frontiers of the empire; and, in jealousy, or in justice, opposed the assumed claims of the powerful Prætorians to dispose of the empire by the fiat of their will.

Three candidates for empire,* generals of these respec-

* Severus, Albin, and Niger, all generals, formed by Marcus Aurelius, respected by the army, and feared by the enemy.—*History of Rome.*

tive armies, fought for the greatest prize the world could give; the commander of the Pannonian army, Septimius Severus, an African, was the victor. An ambitious soldier, trained in the implicit obedience of camps, and used to the despotism of command, discerning and relentless, he long concealed his daring ambition, which "never deviated from its course, through apprehensions of danger or feelings of humanity." Whatever is most cruel in the consequences of civil war followed the steps of the new emperor; and he was preceded to the gates of Rome by the head of his brave rival, Albinus, and by a letter that announced to the Romans his resolution to spare none of the adherents of his two unfortunate competitors.*

This paltry vengeance, taken on a brave and discomfited enemy and brother soldier, was followed by the accomplishment of his ferocious promise. He put twenty Roman senators, in the presence of their weeping families, to death; and having, by the force of his restless and relentless energies, established tranquillity at home, he carried his arms into the East, where (cruel in Asia as in Rome) he put all to death that had resisted his power.

On his return from Syria, through Palestine, Septimius was struck by the invincible spirit of the Jews, who had attempted some resistance to his power; and he ordered that no subject of the empire should profess the religion of Moses. He was jealous also of the mild influence of the Christians, whose creed of peace, charity, and love, was a reproach to that system of warfare and physical supremacy, by which he reigned over the fortunes and the destinies of mankind. He issued, therefore, an unsparing edict against the followers of Jesus, the pertinacious reformers whose principles his power could not annihilate, though their lives were at his disposal. Letting loose the tigerish spirit of persecution against all the dissenters from his own state standard of credulity and violence, he again raised the stake in Palestine; and one of the first victims committed to the flames was a woman: Macella, the mother of Pota-

* "La femme, les enfans, et tous les partisans d'Albin qu'on put saisir, furent égorgés."—*Segur.*

nianus, led the way to more distinguished martyrs—to Ireneus, bishop of Lyons, and to the father of the celebrated Origen.

The emperor, on his return to Rome, (where he came in triumph to enjoy a glory merited by great exploits, and sullied by great crimes,*) put several Christian soldiers to death; and it was at this perilous epoch that Tertullian dared to publish his eloquent apology for Christianity—a glorious manifesto of charity and faith, in favour of reform, put forth at the head-quarters of violence and oppression. He proved, upon irrecusable evidence, that the sect called Christians aimed at no temporal power, and coveted no worldly wealth; that their force was moral and spiritual, not physical nor temporal; that they were submissive to the laws, and to the government of the empire—not armed against them; that their morals and manners were as mild as they were pure; that violence could not triumph over their conviction; and that persecution only increased their numbers.

Such was the beautiful picture of a community, held together by a moral principle, and characterized by a spiritual sentiment—a community whose ministers were unpaid, unendowed, untitled, unoffending by any of those gorgeous Oriental forms which conferred personal distinction, the crosier of the augur, the tiara of the Persian priesthood. The courageous Tertullian proceeded with the following frank confession:—"We are already in your camps, in your senates, in your cities, in your fields, in your palaces, in your houses! we have left you only your temples, and your amphitheatres." He might have added, also, we share the pillow of imperial repose, and slumber on the bosom of imperial power. The heart of the tyrant who persecutes us, beats sometimes responsively to our own; and the pulse, quickened by the uncontrolled

* "The contemporaries of Severus, in the peace and glory of his reign, forgave the cruelties by which it was introduced. Posterity, who experienced the fatal effects of his maxims and example, justly considered him as the principal author of the decline of the Roman empire."—*Gibbon*, vol. i.

passions of unlimited power, calms down to softer emotions, under the influence of the earliest, the truest, and most pertinacious of our ministers—woman!

Such a minister was ever near the impetuous and merciless emperor, cherishing the faint spark of humanity which a niggard nature had kindled in his heart, counteracting the atrocious counsels of Plautianus, his infamous minister, softening his own cruel edicts, and moderating his violence: and if the persecution against the Christians did not wholly cease, it was relaxed, through the influence of the most accomplished and intellectual woman of the age, the empress, Julia Domna.

It belonged to the ignorance of the rude soldier, bred in camps, to believe in judicial astrology, and to the ambitious adventurer, who had early raised his eyes from the government of a province to an empire, to desire a high alliance. Severus was led, by both these impulses, to select a wife from amongst the fairest favourites of fortune and nature. He chose "a young lady of Emesa, in Syria, who had 'a royal nativity,' and who, on her arrival in Rome, with a sister scarcely less eminently endowed, is, by some historians, supposed to have attracted the notice and protection of the Empress Annia Faustina. The courtly favour, it is thought, contributed to the elevation of the beautiful stranger, by forwarding her union with Severus, who was then one of the most celebrated generals of the day."*

Julia Domna was the daughter of a noble Phœnician, a high priest of the temple of the Sun at Emesa. Nature had endowed her with great intellectual and personal endowments; and the high gifts of beauty, wit, imagination, and discernment, were augmented by all the advantages of study and education. She is said to have been well acquainted with history, moral philosophy, geometry, and other sciences, which she cultivated through life; and her mental accomplishments won her the friendship of all the most distinguished among the learned in Rome, "where,"

* De Tillemont, Hist. des Empereurs.

(says one of her modern historians, in modern phrase,) "elle vint, dans l'intention de faire fortune, et y reussit."

From the time of her union with Severus, (twenty years before his elevation to the throne,) he almost always adopted her counsels, and mainly owed to them that high reputation with his army, which induced his troops in Illyria to proclaim him emperor. Although Julia Domna has been accused, by the scandal of ancient history,* of gallantry in her early days, (the common accusation of the compilers of anecdotes, who pass for historians,) all writers acknowledge that the follies of her youth were effaced by the virtues and the genius which glorified her maturity; and that, when seated on the throne of the empire, she surrounded it by whatever the declining literature and science of the day still preserved of the wise, able, and eminent.

Wherever she went, she was accompanied by the most learned and philosophical men of Rome; and wherever the sword of persecution was returned to its sheath by her suspicious and saturnine husband, the relenting act was ascribed to the mediation of the wise and humane empress, who, in the lifetime of the father,† gave promise of the sagacious administration, with which she commenced the reign of her fearful son, Caracalla.

Julia Domna deserved all that the stars could promise her. "She possessed, even in advanced age," (says Gibbon,) "the attractions of beauty, and united to a lively imagination a firmness of mind and strength of judgment seldom bestowed on her sex. Her amiable qualities never made any deep impression on the dark and jealous temper of her husband;‡ but in her son's reign she administered the principal affairs of the empire with a prudence that supported his authority, and with a moderation that some-

* Gibbon.

† "Les conseils qu'elle donnait à son épouse, et qu'il suivoit presque toujours, contribuèrent à lui mériter la haute réputation qu'il avait parmi les troupes."—*Dictionnaire Universelle, Historique et Biographique.*

‡ This is contradicted by other writers, and even by Gibbon himself.

times corrected his wild extravagances. Julia applied herself to letters and philosophy, with some success, and with the most splendid reputation. She was the patroness of every art, and the friend of every man of genius; and the grateful flattery of the learned has celebrated her virtue."

Severus, though he escaped assassination, (the natural death of a Roman emperor,) died after the old fashion of the most successful military adventurers, worn out with fatigues, satiated with power, and preaching those virtues to others which he had never practised; as if the act of dying was a personal distinction, that conferred on the moribund, authority to propound maxims which in life they had never exemplified. "Omnia fui et nihil expedit," was his last, (perhaps his first,) moral reflection; and the desire of perpetuating the greatness of his family was his last ambition.

The sons who succeeded him, the two young fierce Cæsars, Caracalla and Geta, (whom he had associated in his power while living, and one of whom attempted to hasten his death,*) disappointed the hopes of their father, and of Rome:—if, indeed, Rome had any hopes of youths who early displayed "the indolent security of hereditary princes, and a presumption that fortune would supply the place of merit and application." On their return from Britain to Rome, the unnatural hatred, the implacable antipathy which had already broken forth in the jealousies of their infancy, rendered it obvious "that only one could reign, and that the other must fall."

On their arrival in the capital, they immediately divided the vast extent of the imperial palace between them. "No communication was allowed between their apartments; the doors and passages were diligently fortified, and guards

* "While the emperor was dying at York, (after his expedition into Caledonia, against Fingal, his heroes and bards, Caracalla, 'the son of the king of the world,'† impatient of delay, or division of empire, attempted to shorten the small remains of his father's life, and to excite a mutiny among the troops."—*Gibbon.*

† Ossian's Poems.

posted and relieved, with the same strictness as in a besieged place." The young emperors never met but in public, and then only in the presence of their afflicted mother.

If all Rome, (brutified as it was by the constant spectacle of crime,) was shocked by the violence of this fraternal discord, which the conventional ceremonies and profound dissimulation of a court could ill disguise, the still devoted mother, the high-minded Julia Domna, beheld it with deep affliction, and the worst predictions of its evil consequences. A latent civil war was already distracting the government, and originating a scheme for separating the hostile brothers, by dividing the empire between them, a scheme which would eventually have terminated in "the dissolution of the empire itself, whose unity had hitherto remained inviolable." The empress mother, to whose superior genius both brothers still resorted, (through an influence difficult to account for,) contemplated the fatal negotiation, with grief and indignation; and it is admitted by all the historians who have treated of the times, that her tears and eloquence alone broke up the fatal treaty, and thus for a time saved the empire.

Caracalla, who listened with his habitual deference, and profound dissimulation, to his mother's arguments, consented to abide by her decision; and, affecting to yield to her entreaties, met his long estranged brother in her apartments, upon terms of seeming peace and lasting conciliation. The meeting took place under the fondest aspirations of the confiding mother's heart; and a conversation, carried on with ease and confidence, had commenced among the reunited family, when some centurions, ingeniously concealed in the apartment, rushed suddenly with drawn swords upon the young and unfortunate Geta. The distracted mother threw her arms round the victim; and, striving in vain to shield him in her embrace, was wounded in the hand, in the dreadful struggle. Covered with the blood of her younger son, she saw her elder animating and assisting the fury of his assassins; and Geta fell dead at her feet.

Caracalla,* with fear and fury stamped on his countenance, flew to the asylum of the Prætorian camp, the natural sanctuary of an imperial murderer, stained with his brother's blood. "The soldiers," (says the historian,) "raised and comforted him, as he fell prostrate before the statues of the tutelar deities of the camp:" but who was to comfort the bereaved mother?

The emperor, armed with the protection of the army, (purchased by the most lavish donations of the accumulated treasures of his father's reign,) hurried to the senate, and prevailed on that obsequious assembly, (which was always prepared to ratify the decisions of fortune,) to declare in his favour.† But there was another assembly, congregated by sympathy and pity, less prepared to ratify his crime. On his return from the senate to the imperial palace, the fratricide proceeded to his mother's apartment, and found the empress surrounded by the noblest matrons of Rome, mothers like herself, and weeping, in common feelings of humanity and maternity, the wretchedness of one, who, as the mother of the murdered and the murderer, was equally inaccessible to hope or consolation.

The jealous temper of Caracalla, rankling with remorse and cruelty, became furious at the reproachful and touching spectacle. He ordered the ladies to disperse, threatening them with death; and, to prove his fearful sincerity, he consigned one of the terrified mourners to instant execution. This victim was of imperial rank—a woman who had "done the state some service," who had advocated the people's cause, and had saved the life of a Roman emperor, and quelled an insurrection: the person chosen as a terrible example by Caracalla was Fadilla, the last remaining daughter of the emperor Marcus Aurelius, and the saviour-sister of Commodus.

After the execution of this imperial princess, even the august but wretched mother of the fratricide emperor was

* Herodian.

† One of the senate proposing the apotheosis of Geta, the emperor replied, "I consent: I like him better in heaven than on earth."

obliged to silence her lamentations, to suppress her sighs, "and to receive her assassin son with smiles of approbation." For he was still her son; and still for his sake, and for that of the empire, she resumed her influence on his government, (whatever it might be) and "administered the principal affairs of the empire, with a justice that supported his authority, and with a moderation that sometimes corrected his wild extravagances."*

The murder of Fadilla, the friend and confidant of the empress mother, was followed with other acts of vengeance and cruelty against all who came under the vague appellation of "the friends of Geta;" and twenty thousand persons of both sexes are computed to have been put to death. The most eminent lawyer of Rome, Papinian, the friend of Severus and Julia, was among the number of the victims.† His death was lamented as a public calamity; while the execution of so many innocent citizens "was bewailed by the secret tears of their friends and their families."

It was a maxim of Caracalla "to secure the affections of the army, and to esteem the rest of his subjects as of little consequence;" and he died the victim of this physical-force philosophy, by which he had lived and reigned. He was murdered during his progress in the East, and while on a pilgrimage to the temple of the Moon at Carræ. A Scythian archer of the imperial guard struck the blow, the paid agent of a military conspiracy, provoked by the emperor's jealousy of Opilius Macrinus, the Prætorian Prefect, A.D. 227.‡

The house of Severus was extinguished; and the empire was three days without a master, when the choice of the

* Dion Cassius. Liv. lxxvii. Gibbon, vol. i. Julia, representing to her son that the people were so exhausted by his rapacity, that they could no longer pay the ordinary taxes, he replied:—"I shall have whatever money I want, as long as I command a sword."

† Having been desired to compose a defence for the emperor, he refused the task, observing, "it is easier to commit fratricide than to justify it."

‡ Montesquieu, finding the name of "tyrant" too mild for such a monster, calls him the destroyer of mankind, and adds:—"Caligula, Neron, Domitien, et Commode, n'exerçaient leur cruautés, que dans Rome; Caracalla promenait ses fureurs dans le monde entier."

army fell, after some hesitation, upon the secret instigator of the assassin of Caracalla—Macrinus.

To the last hour of her son's life, Julia Domna, who had accompanied him to the East, administered all that was moral or intellectual in the government of the empire; and the respectful civility of the usurper Macrinus to the widow of Severus might have flattered her with a hope of an honourable, if not a happy old age, in the society of the lettered and the scientific, whom to the last she served and protected.

But the heart, if not the spirit, of this great woman, and most unfortunate of mothers, was broken. "She had experienced all the vicissitudes of fortune. From an humble station she had been raised to greatness, only to taste the superior bitterness of an exalted rank. She was doomed to weep over the death of one of her sons, and over the life of another. The terrible death of Caracalla, though her good sense must have long taught her to expect it, awakened the feelings of a mother and an empress. She descended with a painful struggle into the condition of a subject, and soon withdrew herself, by a voluntary death, from an anxious and a humiliating dependence."* She refused all food, and died of inanition.

CHAPTER XI.

The Women of the Empire. Julia Maesa. Soemias. Mammea.

THE empire, on the death of Caracalla, and under the sudden and transient usurpations of Macrinus, resembled some enormous and untrustworthy bark, struggling for existence amidst the rage and fury of contending ele-

* This passage from Gibbon is founded on the authority of Dion, and the abridgment of Xiphilins, which, he says, "though less particular, is in this place, clearer than the original."

ments, straining against the storm, tossed by the swell, and torn and dismantled, beyond the science or power of its commander to right or save it. Yet, beneath the tempest of destructive events, which was sweeping over the surface of society, there flowed on an under-current of history, winding its way to posterity, (though but by a thread,) like the subterranean streamlet, which the earthquake above disturbs not in its course.

Marcus Macrinus, an obscure native of Algiers, who had passed through the grades of gladiator, notary, lawyer, and prefect, ascended the throne through perfidy and murder. He was still in Syria, and had scarcely felt himself an emperor, amidst the antagonist interests and discontents of the army and the senate, when a conspiracy of women, "concerted with prudence and conducted with vigour," hurled the false and feeble usurper from the elevated point to which crime and cruelty had led him; and added another page to the history of the intellectual activity of the sex, by which the destinies of mankind have been so often covertly influenced.

After the murder of Caracalla, and the death of the Empress Julia Domna, her sister, Julia Maesa, was ordered by the Emperor Macrinus to leave the court and city of Antioch. In the course of twenty years' favour, during the reigns of her brother-in-law, the Emperor Severus, and of her nephew, Caracalla, Julia Maesa had maintained her position near the person of her imperial sister, had amassed an enormous fortune, and made high alliances. The young Syrian adventuress, who had first studied the weakness and gullibility of man in the Temple of Emesa, and who had come to Rome to seek her fortune, not only had won, but what was far more difficult in such times, had maintained it.

Well studied in all the arts and means by which society is móved or imposed on, she had become a power in the imperial court, in which she resided, and which she had followed to Antioch. On the mandate of Macrinus, she retired to her native city of Emesa, taking with her an immense fortune, her two beautiful and widowed daugh-

ters, Soæmias and Mammea, and their two sons, (for each had an only child). The younger, Alexander Severus, the son of Mammea, was still in childhood. Bassianus, the son of Soæmias, who had received his cognomen of Heliogabalus from his early consecration to the ministry of Highpriest of the Sun, was a youth of nineteen, remarkable for the beauty of his person, the vivacity of his character, and the grace of his movements.

The troops stationed at Emesa, and constrained by the severe discipline of the new emperor to pass the winter in that remote encampment, resorted in crowds (either from idleness or devotion) to the splendid Temple of the Sun. There, they beheld with veneration and delight the elegant figure and dress of the young pontiff, in whom they thought they recognised a resemblance to his cousin, Caracalla, whose memory they still adored.

Julia Maesa, who had probably, more from prudence than superstition, placed her elder grandson in the sanctuary of the most venerated of the eastern temples, saw and cherished the rising partiality of the army for the young and splendid priest. She even endeavoured to deepen the impression of his resemblance to their murdered sovereign, by insinuating a suspicion more favourable to her ambitious views for her grandson, than to the honour of his mother. By the hands of her emissaries, she distributed sums of money to the troops with a lavish hand; and the troops, eager to avenge the hardships inflicted on them by an emperor they despised, were easily induced to proclaim Heliogabalus emperor—to assert his supposed hereditary right—and to call upon the army to join the standard of him, who had taken up arms to revenge the death of Caracalla, on the oppressor of the military. The camps and garrisons of Syria heard the appeal, and responded to it: and successive detachments murdered their officers, and joined the rebels.

Macrinus, with difficulty roused to meet the danger, marched, with his Prætorians and the main body of the army, upon the rebel force of the Syrian prince; and thought to defeat, by a blow, what he contemptuously

named "the infant's conspiracy." But the soldiers considered him with distrust; while the increasing and zealous army of the young pretender were animated by the presence, and fanaticised by the arts and eloquence, of Maesa and Soæmias—(the one in the prime of her genius, the other of her beauty;) who, according to their Asiatic custom, accompanied the army in their chariots.

The reluctance of the imperial troops to attack the rebel forces was apparent in their first faint onset; but the Prætorian guards, with a sudden outburst of their ancient spirit, asserted their superiority in discipline, and the rebel ranks were broken. The glories of the young representative of the Sun were on the point of being eclipsed for ever; when Maesa and Soæmias, throwing themselves from their chariots, mounted their chargers: and, galloping into the heart of the fray, excited the compassion and animated the drooping courage of the troops, while they even inspired their son with a temporary and transient heroism, foreign to his character. Thus influenced, Heliogabalus, placing himself at the head of the troops they had rallied, plunged, sword in hand, into the thickest of the enemy.

It was then that Macrinus, astounded, or intimidated, fled while the battle was yet doubtful; and the Prætorians, ashamed of the deserter for whom they fought, instantly surrendered. The Roman army, thus again united, "mingled tears of joy;" and the physical force of the strongest, (governed by the moral power of the weakest,) ranged itself under the banners of Maesa and Soæmias.

Macrinus and his son were taken and put to death; and the Roman senate, called on to legalize forms dictated by the army, solemnly proclaimed Heliogabalus emperor; at the same time, bestowing the imperial title of Augusta on his mother and grandmother, to whose genius and skill it was considered that he owed the empire.

The choice of Maesa would, probably, have fallen on Alexander, but he was a child. In political, as in moral science, wisdom is sometimes compelled to adopt a present and available incident, in furtherance of a great and future

good; and in such cases hesitation is more frequently the result of weakness than caution. With all the exquisite personal beauty and imposing deportment of Heliogabalus, the young priest of the Sun was but the expedient of the astute and statesmanlike mind of his grandmother. To dethrone Macrinus, before he returned to Rome,—to offer to the senate an immediate representative, and the army an imposing image of power, in the person of one who carried so brilliant an influence along with him,—was a device which, (though temporary and even dangerous,) afforded the only means by which the able but unscrupulous Maesa could effect a revolution that involved the interests of the empire, along with the safety and lives of her own family.

But, remote from the pageantry by which her purposes were temporarily answered, Maesa had still a reserve of hope and promise, for the happiness and solace of mankind, in the character, the genius, and natural virtues, of the son of her young daughter, Mammea—Alexander Severus—as yet but a studious and affectionate boy, in the hands of the wisest of tutors, and the most sagacious of mothers.

The young prince, for the present, was kept out of sight; and the obscurity with which his female guardians surrounded him was proof of their discretion. Heliogabalus, after wasting a year, contrary to the wishes of his family and partisans, in his luxurious and splendid progress from Syria to Italy, at last made his entry into the capital. He was the first emperor of an Asiatic extraction; and his picture, (which preceded his arrival, and was placed over the altar of victory in the senate house,) conveyed to the Romans a just but by no means favourable resemblance of the person and manners of the Syrian prince.

He was depicted in his sacerdotal robes of silk and gold; his head was crowned with a tiara (the mitre of a Priest of the Sun); and his numerous collars and bracelets were studded with gems of great value. "His eyebrows, also, were tinged with black, and his cheeks painted with an

artificial red and white; and the grave senators confessed with a sigh, that, after having long experienced the stern tyranny of their own countrymen, Rome was at length humbled beneath the effeminate luxury of Oriental despotism."

To his tutelar deity, the young emperor ascribed his elevation to the throne; and, in this consciousness of his divine right, he scoffed at all human control. The influence of his early priestcraft was more powerful than all the worldly wisdom of his grandmother could effect to counteract it; and the title of pontiff was dearer to him than all the titles of imperial greatness.*

Mingling the most superstitious fanaticism with the most profligate vices and effeminate luxury, he was frequently seen leading the solemn procession of the Sun, which (represented by a black conical stone, set with gems,) was placed in a chariot, drawn by six white horses. The pious emperor, holding the reins, and supported by his ministers, moved backwards, that he might perpetually enjoy the felicity of the divine presence, while in the celebration of the worship which followed. Choirs of Syrian damsels and ballets of dancing girls followed; and "the gravest personages of the state and army, clothed in long Phœnician tunics, officiated in the meanest functions, with affected zeal and secret indignation."†

To all these innovations upon the common sense and common decencies of society, the people, the soldiers, and the senate, were still disgracefully submissive; and when the frantic follies of the emperor received one courageous check, it was from the firmness of a few retired but venerated women, the priestesses of Vesta. Upon making the Temple of the Sun, the common centre of religious worship in Rome, the imperial fanatic resolved on removing the Palladium, and all the "sacred pledges of the faith of

* Herodius.—Gibbon.

† Royal and religious processions of a similar character, and with a like effect, have been seen in modern times; the greatest persons in the state and army assisting, to prove their orthodoxy and their loyalty to the restored church and state of the Capets.

Numa," to the altars of his tutelar god. In violation of the most religious of all Roman prejudices, he broke into the sanctuary of Vesta, and carried away what he believed to be the Palladium; but the priestesses, by a pious fraud, defeated the sacrilegious violence, and imposed a beautiful but fictitious image on the profane intruder.* It was probably on the discovery of this device, that he again broke in upon the last sanctuary of female purity, and carrying off by force one of the vestals, added her to the succession of wives, which his caprice had immolated to his passions.

The contempt of decency, which had hitherto distinguished all former tyrants was surpassed by the inexpressible infamy of Heliogabalus; which, if not exaggerated, was unparalleled in any other age and country: and even credulity pauses to inquire how millions could submit so long to the mad and vicious atrocities of one maniac; and that maniac, a boy—or how the business of the empire, the indispensable administration that supported its exchequer and provided for the contingencies of its remote provinces all over the world, were organized and perpetuated under such a government.

It is a reproach hurled at Heliogabalus by the most philosophical of modern historians, that it was reserved for him "to permit the acts of the senate to be discharged in the name of his mother, Soæmias, who was placed in the senate, by the side of the consuls, and who subscribed as a regular member the decrees of the legislative assembly."

"In every age and country," continues Gibbon, "the wiser, or at least the stronger, of the two sexes has usurped the powers of the state, and confined the other to the cares and pleasures of domestic life. In hereditary monarchies, however, and especially in those of modern Europe, the gallant spirit of chivalry, and the law of succession, have accustomed us to allow a singular exception; and a woman is often acknowledged the absolute sovereign of a great kingdom, in which she would be deemed incapable of ex-

* Hist. August.

ercising the smallest employment, civil or military. But, as the Roman emperors were still considered as the generals and magistrates of the republic, their wives and mothers, although distinguished by the name of Augusta, were never associated to their personal honours; and a female reign would have appeared an inexplicable prodigy." In imperial Rome, however, such prodigies were neither new nor inexplicable.

But, while Soæmias was "subscribing decrees," and strenuously busied in the public affairs, what was her son, her emperor and master, about? What prank was "the wiser, or at least stronger of the two sexes" playing? what crime was Heliogabalus perpetrating? what dish was he concocting?* or was the senate, whose wisdom this obtrusive woman was supposed to insult by her presence, really more indignant at the "inexplicable prodigy" of the admittance of the emperor's mother into their august assembly, than at the elevation of the emperor's barber, or court-fool, to the honours of the prefecture?

The master of the world, in spite of the counsels of his mother, and the reprobation of his grandame, affected to copy the dress and manners of the female sex, and to prefer the distaff to the sceptre. Habited in silken robes, studded with gems, he passed his days in lounging on couches of massy gold, cushioned with eider-down; and, when not engaged abroad in the most disgraceful pursuits, he was shut up in apartments strewn with flowers, and lighted from golden cressets, fed with balm and amber, where he was perpetually surrounded by buffoons, players, parasites, and concubines. It was, probably, from the midst of this privy council that he issued his famous census, "for numbering all the rats, mice, and spiders in Rome, to give him an idea of its population."

* The invention of a new sauce was liberally rewarded; but, if it was not relished, the inventor was confined to eat of nothing else, till he had discovered another more agreeable to the imperial palate. Heliogabalus never could eat sea-fish except at a great distance from the sea; he then would distribute vast quantities of the rarest sorts, brought at an immense expense, to the peasants of the inland country.—*Hist. August.* p. 109.

Under such circumstances, might not a woman, and that woman a mother, be excused her presumption in watching over the public interests, which her "wiser" or "stronger" master neglected; bringing her instincts and quick natural perceptions to bear upon a craft, in which so many fools and so many knaves have been deemed adepts? Might she not venture to play a game, which the worst and wickedest of the other sex had hitherto played in Rome, with such fearful odds, against the welfare and happiness of mankind—the game of power!

While the mother of Heliogabalus was acting with energy in the senate, his "crafty grandmother," the foundress of his fortunes, was watching over him in the interior of his palace, and vainly endeavouring to check the torrent of vice and crime, which were hurrying him to perdition. Soon, however, made sensible that her elder grandson must eventually destroy himself, by the violence of his own passions, she prepared to bring forward that other and surer support of his family, whose happy nature his mother and herself had so long fostered and improved by the noblest education.

That Maesa believed Heliogabalus mad, there can be no doubt; and she, therefore, embraced a favourable moment of fondness or devotion, to persuade the young emperor to adopt his cousin, Alexander Severus, and to endow him with the title of Cæsar,—an act which she observed would leave him to his own divine and pious vocation of high-priest of the sun, "no longer distracted by the cares of the earth."

The youthful Alexander Severus was shortly after declared Cæsar: but, by acquiring the affections of the people, he soon awakened the jealousy and hatred of the emperor, who frequently attempted by stratagem to take his life. By the vigilance of his grandmother, and the prudence of the faithful servants whom his mother Mammea had placed about his person, Alexander, however, escaped; and the meditated crimes of Heliogabalus were frequently frustrated by his own loquacious folly.

In a fit of passion, and by a despotic sentence, the em-

peror at length determined to degrade his cousin from the rank and title of Cæsar. The message was received in the senate with silence, in the camp with fury; and the Prætorians swore to protect Alexander, and vindicate the majesty of the throne, to which they had raised the tyrant whom they now blushed to own. For this mutiny the emperor attempted to punish some of the leaders, and the sedition of the guards was the result.

The headlong imprudence of Heliogabalus was fatal to himself and to his ministers: he was assassinated by the Prætorians, his body thrown into the Tiber, and his memory branded with infamy by the senate. Alexander Severus, endeared to the Romans by his dangers and his virtues, and, above all, by the favour created for him by Maesa and his mother, was raised to the throne, and "invested in one day with all the various titles and powers of imperial dignity."

The new emperor, "a modest and dutiful youth, of only seventeen years of age," committed the reins of government to the hands of his mother Mammea, and of Maesa; and, after the death of the latter, (who survived his elevation but a short time,) Mammea remained the sole regent of her son, and of the empire.*

With a profound knowledge of mankind, and in full possession of public opinion on the subject of female government (against which the maxims of the most authoritative writers were directed),† Mammea resolved on avoiding all offensive display of power. Her first judicious act was to decline the prerogative assumed by her more ambitious sister, of taking her place in the legislative assembly of the empire; her next, to issue a law excluding women for ever from the senate, with the penalty of "devoting to the infernal gods the head of her by whom this law should be violated." She well knew that society, governed more by

* Gibbon. Hist. August.

† Metellus Numidicus, the censor, avowed to the Roman people, in a public oration, that had kind Nature allowed man to exist without the help of women, he would have been delivered from a very troublesome companion.

conventional forms than by principles, took ready offence at every tangible image of power, that interfered with the exclusive mastery of the "wiser or stronger sex;" while it lent its suffrages to the secret influence, and profited by the private agency which, though often greater than the throne, was still behind it.

"The substance, not the pageantry of power, was the object of Mammea's manly ambition;" and she maintained an absolute and lasting empire over the mind of her son, while she brooked no rival in his affections. It was under the impulse of this maternal jealousy, (the besetting sin of fond motherhood) that she committed the one only crime and fault that clouded her bright reign:* at the risk of losing her son's affections, she banished his young wife, on the pretence of a conspiracy, which it was affirmed that her father had formed against the throne of his son-in-law.

The senate who had readily confirmed the election of Alexander to the throne of the empire, and saluted the boy sovereign with the title of "father of his country," was satisfied to leave the administration in the hands of his mother, who instantly organized a council of sixteen, taken from the most estimable of the members of the senate. She also raised Fabius Sabinus, "the Cato of his age," and Ulpian, the most eminent jurisconsult of any age, to the ministry. The probity and talents of these men endeared them to the people; and the recorded wisdom of their policy justifies their election in the eyes of posterity.

If the most eminent female sovereigns have been reproached with owing the glory of their reigns to the able ministers who have directed their councils, society at least stands indebted to female sagacity, for the penetration which brings forward such men, and the pertinacity which retains them.

The young emperor was early taught to despise the effeminate habits and vain forms of a court, which had been mounted by his mad cousin upon the gorgeous

* Dion Cassius.

heraldry of oriental fashions. He relinquished the sacrilegious title which the vileness of the Roman people had lavished on the late emperor; and one of his first decrees forbade that any should give him the name of "Lord." Habited in a simple white robe, without gold or jewels, Alexander walked the streets of Rome, unaccompanied even by a single guard: mingling freely with the citizens, he conversed much with the lettered and scientific, and was only cold and haughty to the servile and the false.

Under his mother's counsels, he encouraged a general reform in all the departments of government. The most enlightened jurisconsults of the day were called in to assist the senate with their advice and authority. He even conciliated the professors of Christianity, by adopting one of their highest dogmas, which was inscribed in letters of gold in many parts of his palace: "Do unto others as you would they should do unto you."

The utmost toleration was shown to the rights of conscience; and, in spite of the prejudices of the people, the government, more enlightened than the governed, not only rejected persecutions for religion's sake, but proposed to erect a temple to the founder of the sect of the Christians, and to raise the divine reformer of the existing morals, and the teacher of a new religion, to the rank of the worshipped gods of the old theology.

But the still powerful priesthood took the alarm, and roused the bigotry of the orthodox votarists of "Jupiter the thunderer," while they remonstrated with the young emperor on his dangerous innovation: "If you raise temples to this new deity," they observed, "our temples will be deserted;" and the union between the church and state of Rome was still too intimate and formidable, to permit the government to fly in the face of the Pagan hierarchy.*

There was, however, a private chapel, a domestic temple, in the interior of the imperial palace, which, in its singular assemblage of the tangible imagery of all religions, proved that the sovereign (more tolerant than his

* Histoire Universelle.—Hist. August.

people) was also more philosophic than exclusive, in his devotion to any one particular creed. This chapel contained, among the statues of the virtuous and eminent of all countries and ages, those of Abraham and of Christ, to which the young emperor offered divine honours, "considering that whatever was marked by a character of grandeur and wisdom, was in itself divine."

Still Alexander Severus was not a Christian; for he openly professed the religion of the state, and attended its gorgeous worship; but he loved the morality of Christianity, and he revered the doctrine of his mother's creed. While Maesa, austere, able, and courageous, impressed on his young mind the manly principles which make great sovereigns, his mother, Mammea, indulgent, spiritual, and humane, inspired him with the mild affections of Christianity,* the religion she was herself supposed to profess.

The results of the education by which both these able women called forth the great and inherent qualities of a happy organization, for the blessing of Rome and of mankind, are best illustrated in the habits to which it gave birth; and the history of a day of the ordinary life of Alexander Severus may be considered as a breviary, into which the young sovereigns of modern times (who are not of "the wiser or stronger sex") may look with advantage, when they are placed by "the gallant spirit of chivalry and the law of succession," at the head of great kingdoms, "in defiance of all order and national decorum!"

The early removal of Heliogabalus to the temple of the Sun, and his initiation into the impositions of its priesthood, scarcely account for the differences of character observable in the pupils of the sagacious Maesa. But

* The mother of the reigning emperor was obliged to use much precaution in the profession of a faith which was hostile to the state orthodoxy. It is recorded that when the Empress Mammea passed through Antioch, "she expressed a desire of conversing with the celebrated Origen, the fame of whose piety and learning was spread over the East. Origen obeyed so flattering an invitation, and, though he could not expect to succeed in the conversation of an *artful and ambitious* woman, she listened with pleasure to his eloquent exhortations, and honourably dismissed him to his retirement in Palestine."—*Gibbon.*

education can only develope, it cannot create; and the defective and ignoble nature of Heliogabalus rendered him insensible to those finer impressions, so happily excited in the more spiritual temperament of Alexander, whose excellent understanding soon convinced him of the advantages of virtue, the pleasure of knowledge, and the necessity of labour. "A natural mildness and moderation of temper preserved him from the assaults of passion, and from the allurements of vice. His unalterable regard for his early preceptor, the wise Ulpian, guarded his inexperienced youth from the poison of flattery."

"Alexander rose early: the first moments of the day were consecrated to private devotion, and his domestic chapel was filled with the images of those heroes, who, by improving or reforming human life, had deserved the grateful reverence of posterity. But, as he deemed the service of mankind the most acceptable worship of the gods, the greatest part of his morning hours was employed in his council, when he discussed public affairs and determined private causes, with a patience and discretion above his years. The dryness of business was relieved by the charms of literature; and a portion of time was always set apart for his favourite studies of poetry, history, and philosophy. The works of Virgil and Horace, the republics of Plato and Cicero, formed his taste, enlarged his understanding, and gave him the noblest ideas of man and government.

"The exercises of the body succeeded to those of the mind; and Alexander, who was tall, active, and robust, surpassed most of his equals in gymnastic arts. Refreshed by the use of the bath and a slight dinner, he resumed with new vigour the business of the day; and, till the hour of supper, the principal meal of the Romans, he was attended by his secretaries, with whom he read and answered the multitude of letters, memorials, and petitions that must have been addressed to the master of the greatest part of the world. His table was served with the most frugal simplicity; and, whenever he was at liberty to consult his own inclination, the company consisted of a few

select friends, men of learning and virtue, amongst whom Ulpian was constantly invited. Their conversation was familiar and instructive; and the pauses were occasionally enlivened by the recital of some pleasing composition, which supplied the place of the dancers, comedians, and even gladiators, so frequently summoned to the tables of the rich and luxurious Romans. The dress of Alexander was plain and modest, his demeanour courteous and affable; at the proper hours his palace was open to all his subjects, but the voice of a crier was heard, as in the Eleusinian mysteries, pronouncing the same salutary admonition: 'Let none enter those holy walls, unless he is conscious of a pure and innocent mind.'"*

Among the anticipated institutions of modern times, founded by this extraordinary government, (organized by a woman, and administered by the child of her care, and pupil of her precepts,) was a public school, opened for gratuitous education, and more peculiarly dedicated to the reception of orphan infancy. Alexander, to mark his respect for her who originated the beneficent idea, called these schools Mammean.

But the wise female legislator, so capable of noble and philosophical generalizations, failed through her early and inveterate habits of female economy. By her spirit of detail, and an impatient reform of abuses which had become a part and parcel of the law of the land, she weakened her own influence, and endangered the throne of her son. Her reduction of the civil list soon extended to the military expenditure; and she is accused of having exercised her ascendancy over the emperor to induce him to reduce the largesses to the soldiery, which the corruption of the time and the influence of the army rendered necessary. Other attempts at military reform were also made; seconded by the minister Ulpian. These, however, rendered him the object of special hatred to the cohorts, (enemies to all discipline.) The soldiers accordingly rose, attacked and pursued him to the palace, and even to the

* Gibbon.

apartment of the emperor, who, throwing himself before their victim, bravely defended him. But the effort was vain: and Ulpian was murdered almost in the arms of his sovereign. Alexander, though he could not save his minister, punished with the utmost severity the chief leaders of the sedition, and thus paved the way, by his courage and justice, to his own ruin.

A long peace of ten years, and all the prosperity which peace brings with it had given to Rome and her provinces that repose which humanizes a people, and, without the odium of an oppressive taxation, fills the treasury of a government—when Artaxerxes, whose ambition knew no bounds, after vanquishing the Parthians, attacked the Romans in Syria with fearful success, and filled all Rome with shame and apprehension.

The emperor, less timid, and more temperate than his subjects, addressed a letter to the Persian monarch, exhorting him to consolidate his own unstable throne by peace and wisdom, rather than to seek a vain glory at the expense of the blood of his subjects, and of the world's repose. The reply of the Persian hero was in the true spirit of a military despot, and an oriental sovereign. "Laws and principles (he said) are for the vulgar; the right of kings is their might. Tell your emperor such is my reply to his philosophic letter, and that I shall oppose my camp to his paper, my sword to his pen, my blood to his ink, and my actions to his discourses."

To this military pedantry Alexander made no reply; but, calmly accounting to the senate and the people for the necessity he was under of beginning a war, to which their pecuniary resources were to contribute,—and, having deliberately counselled with his ablest generals concerning his plans of operation, he left Rome, its senate, and a population in tears and mourning for his departure, and marched for Antioch, the Sybaris of the East. The first and last despatch of Alexander to the senate was short but satisfactory, and concluded with the simple and modest phrase—"The countries conquered by Artaxerxes have returned under the Roman domination." Rome received back her

emperor with transports of joy and gratitude. The people demanded for him the honours of a triumph, and he entered the capital in a chariot drawn by the elephants which he had taken in battle from the enemy. But the greater triumph was in his mother's heart; and when the senate gave him the name of Persicus, she may have glorified herself in pronouncing the far dearer name of "son."

Rome did not long enjoy her triumphs and her peace. The Germans, by passing the Rhine, and ravaging Illyria and Gaul, obliged the emperor again to take the field: the people again wept his departure, and his mother accompanied him on this, his last and most perilous, campaign.

Alexander continued to display the talents of a great general, and the courage of a brave soldier; and he soon beat back the enemy to the shores of the Rhine. But a domestic and unsuspected enemy, in the heart of his army, and at its head, stood armed, and near his person, ready to strike a blow, which even maternal vigilance could not avert. This enemy was his friend, his dependent, one whose bravery had placed him in command over the army, Maximin,—a Goth by birth, a barbarian by nature.

The emperor had retired to his tent from the fatigues of the field; and, after a frugal repast, had thrown himself on his couch and slept. His mother was, as usual, near him, when, about the seventh hour of the day, a part of his own guards broke into the imperial tent, and murdered "their virtuous and unsuspecting prince."* The unfortunate mother, in attempting to save her son, fell dead under the reiterated wounds inflicted by the assassins of both. The similar fate of sons and mothers, so differently constituted as Heliogabalus and Alexander, and their respective parents, is a curious trait in the history of their times, and a further proof of the undeviating constancy of the maternal disposition.

The Prætorians were avenged; and the barbarous and ungrateful instrument of their vengeance, their "Ajax,"

* In his twenty-ninth year, and fourteenth of his reign, A. D. 235.

and their "Hercules," who had led them to conspire against his own patron and friend, by fomenting their discontents, ascended the throne of the empire, and once more gave up the world to anarchy and desolation.

"The administration of Alexander," says Gibbon, "was an unavailing struggle against the corruption of the age." That "firm, wise, and beneficent administration," according to all writers, modern and ancient, was said to be organized and maintained to the last by his mother,* whose influence over the emperor the army abhorred and punished, and on whose errors, the writers of the "wiser sex" have dwelt with visible satisfaction.†

But Mammea's greatest fault was, that she was a reformer: her greatest reproach was that, "by exacting from the riper years of her son the same obedience she had justly claimed from his inexperienced youth, she exposed to public ridicule his character and her own." The history of her son's glorious reign, (a reign of peace, prosperity, and reform,) is the best answer to the reproaches of invidious and partial annalists, imperial satirists, and philosophical, (but not altogether unprejudiced, nor consistent,) historians.

The people and the provinces wept the death of him who had for a time restored their liberties, and revived, in their favour, order and the laws;‡ and even the army,

* "The abilities of that amiable prince, (Alexander,) seem to have been inadequate to the difficulties of his situation, the firmness of his conduct inferior to the purity of his intentions."—*Gibbon.*

† See the Augustan History, Herodian, and the Satires on the Cæsars, in which the Emperor Julian "dwells, with a *visible satisfaction*, on the effeminate weakness of the Syrian, and the ridiculous avarice, (retrenchments,) of his mother." Gibbon is frequently at variance with himself in his rapid and beautiful sketch of the reign of Alexander; and often

"Damns with faint praise"

"the wise and moderate administration" of his government. It is thus, also, that while he speaks of "the first and golden years of the reign of Nero," (when it is notorious Agrippina reigned in his name,) he yet talks of "Agrippina's mad ambition being detected by every Roman citizen," &c.

‡ "The most eminent of civil lawyers, Papinian, Paulus, and Ulpian, flourished under the house of Severus," says Gibbon. But what was the

forgetting the rigour of his reforms, and the severity of his discipline, remembered his virtues, and punished his murderers with death. The senate, in obedience to public feeling, ordered the apotheosis of Alexander Severus and of his mother Mammea; and in the time of Constantine, their joint festivals were still celebrated by the priests and the people.

CHAPTER XII.

The Women of the Empire. Paulina. Victoria.

Julius Maximinus was elected the successor of Alexander Severus; and the most savage and illiterate of men thus succeeded to the most intellectual. Maximin, a Thracian by birth, a giant in stature, a Cyclops in features, and more suited to be the hero of a tale of the Ogres,* than the master of the civilized world, has been universally represented by historians, as barbarous, and bloody, and ignorant of all the arts and institutions of civil life.† His brute courage and military merits, however, had recommended him to the favour of Septimius Severus, of Caracalla, and even of Heliogabalus, who recalled him from

house of Severus? Two young Syrian adventurers, who came to seek their fortune in Rome, and founded it—the one by marrying "un soldat heureux," who became a sovereign; the other, by her extraordinary genius and energy bringing over the army to her views, and placing her two grandsons successively on the throne of the world. It was, however, under this "house of Severus," and when Mammea was carrying on the administration of the empire, that the Roman jurisprudence "having closely united itself with the system of the monarchy, was supposed to have obtained its full maturity and perfection."

* He is described as being eight feet high, consuming forty pounds of meat per day, knocking out the teeth of a horse with a blow, and drawing a loaded cart with ease.—*Hist. August., Segur.*

† He was totally ignorant of Greek, at that time as universal among the educated Romans, in letters and conversation, as French in the present day among the same class in England.

his native Thrace, (where his dislike of Macrinus had banished him) in order to make him tribune. By these high distinctions of imperial favour, he induced Sulpicius, a consular dignitary, to give him in marriage his accomplished and beautiful daughter, Paulina, the worthy descendant of Catulus.

Of the cruelty of the sanguinary Maximin, and even of his "lenity,"* history has taken due note; while of the virtues of his wife little has been said, and that little, incidentally. "Still," (says Gibbon, on the authority of Ammianus Marcellinus) "the wife of Maximin, by insinuating wise counsels with female gentleness, sometimes brought back the tyrant to the way of truth and humanity." Wisdom, truth, and humanity, were, then, the prerogative of the spiritual nature of woman, even at a time when man was fast degenerating into his earliest distinguishing prerogative, brute force!

During the three years' reign of Maximin, in which he disdained to visit either Rome or Italy, the accomplished lady of the most luxurious of all capitals† followed the wandering and predatory camp of her rude husband through Germany and the northern provinces, until the emperor fixed the imperial seat of his stern despotism on the savage shores of the "fast-rolling Danube." What a contrast to the garden scenery of Italy (when all Italy was the garden of Rome,)‡ must the dark forests and gloomy

* "Confiscation, exile, or simple death, were esteemed uncommon instances of lenity."—*Gibbon.*

† The luxuries and refinements of the Romans of the wealthy classes have no parallel in modern times. Pompey's house, which became part of the imperial domains, was then occupied by the Gordians. It surpassed, in splendour and art, all the houses of modern London, and the Parisian hotels of the "grand monarch." It was purchased by the Gordians, the wealthiest and most munificent family in Rome; though "their villa, on the road to Praeneste, was celebrated for baths of singular beauty and extent, and for three stately rooms of a hundred feet in length; but, above all, for a magnificent portico, supported by two hundred columns of the most curious and costly sorts of marble.

‡ "Quoique l'enceint de Rome ne fût pas, à beaucoup près, si grande qu'elle est à présent, les fauxbourgs en étoient prodigieusement étendus: l'Italie, pleine de maisons de plaisance, n'etoit proprement que le jardin de Rome. Les laboureurs étaient en Sicile, en Afrique, en Egypte, et

lakes of this wild region have presented to the young and refined empress!

Supported by the avowed power of the sword, Maximin assumed a supremacy which trampled on every principle of law and justice; while the gentle Paulina sought to temper his fierce decrees by insinuated counsels, which no man dared to have offered to a sovereign, who is said to have rivalled the idea of those "ancient chiefs of slaves and gladiators, whose savage power had left so deep an impression of terror and detestation."

It is recorded of this barbarian that he was wont to wear his wife's bracelets as finger rings; and, in some moment of gorgeous puerility, such as the fiercest warriors are prone to, Paulina may have found a favourable moment to plead the cause of humanity and toleration, to stem the torrent of persecution, again let loose upon the Christians, and to exercise that influence over the passions of her ferocious master, which induced him to impress his medals with her mild image; and, at her death, to immortalize her virtues by acceding to her apotheosis, and giving her the title of "Diva."

The death of Paulina was followed by the most unbridled cruelty and maddening violence of Maximin; and the oppression of the provinces, the exactions of the proconsuls (who even stripped the temples of their treasures, and coined the golden statues of their gods into money,) the rapacity of the procurator of Africa, the disgust and hatred of the senate and the people of Rome, but, above all, the abhorrence of the suffering army, hastened forward the natural destiny of the atrocious tyrant.

Maximin had returned to Italy, and, while besieging Aquilea, (where his soldiers were perishing under its impregnable walls,) a party of the Prætorian guards ("who trembled for their wives and children") slew him in his tent. His head was sent to Rome, the world rejoiced, and the uncontrolled tyranny of man was for a

les jardiniers en Italie: les terres n'etaient presque cultivées que par les esclaves des citoyens Romains."—*Montesquieu Grandeur et Decadence des Romains*, vol. vi.

time suspended by the death of a savage, destitute of every sentiment that distinguishes a human being.

When the courier, expedited by the army to inform the senate of the assassination of Maximin, entered Rome, the people he found assembled at the theatre. The joy was universal, the head of the monster was burnt in the Campus Martius, incense smoked in every temple, confidence was restored to every heart, and peace was re-established throughout the empire. Yet this "monster" was elected to the throne but three short years before, because "the army were impatient of the discipline imposed by an effeminate Syrian, the slave of his mother."*

The further repetition of a story so similar in all its atrocious and successive events, so disgraceful to the species, so heartrending to humanity, and so fearfully illustrative of the evil arising out of a military despotism, and of the base institutes bequeathed to posterity by the earlier Roman emperors, may well be spared, in pages dedicated to the neglected history of woman's moral agency. During the latter half of the third century of the Christian era, the mightiest empire of the world was but an arena, on whose bloody stage anarchy and a barbarian ambition played their dreadful parts, through every phasis of treason and carnage, of the darkest intolerance, and the most reckless cruelty.

The empire had long become the gift of military caprice; and the throne, the seat of all power in one day, had become the scaffold of its occupant the next. Those good men and feeble emperors who succeeded the savage Goth, the two Gordians, Papinian, Balbinus, and the young, brave, and intellectual third Gordian Augustus,† were all murdered in their turn, through the treachery of slaves, and the barbarity of soldiers.‡

* Julian's Satire.

† He was only nineteen years of age when he was murdered. His love of learning introduced Misitheus to his notice, who became his master in rhetoric, his first minister, and his father-in-law—for he married his daughter. The genius of the father, and the accomplishments of the daughter, alone brightened this epoch of brutal power.

‡ The Augustan History.

Philip, by usurpation, and by conspiracy, the successor of the innocent and virtuous Gordian Augustus, was by birth an Arab, by profession a robber, and by temperament bold, brave, treacherous, and cruel. Murdered in his turn, (an assassin gave him the throne—an assassin hurled him from it,) a respite for humanity was hoped, from the election of the high-minded Decius, who succeeded him: but he was only permitted to reign, or serve, two years. His valour and devotedness to the glory of Rome rendered him worthy of a name, already so consecrated in its history; and his heroic death belonged to the poetry, as well as to the annals of his country.*

The short and feeble reign of Valerian, stamped as it was with some faint character of lingering civilisation, passed rapidly away; and the aged emperor, taken prisoner by Sapor in the Persian war, terminated his wretched life in chains and captivity. Military anarchy† then exhibited thirty tyrants at a time, disputing a prize so fatal to the winners. In the foreground of the dramatic terrors of the times, stood conspicuous the accomplished Gallienus, who, decorated by his feeble father Valerian with the title of Cæsar, united all the graces of poetry and eloquence, to all the vices of a Nero and a Heliogabalus.

Of the other phantom-tyrants who started forth from various parts of the empire, in Italy, in Gaul, in Illyria, and in the East, (all taking the name of Cæsar, and some enjoying imperial power, by sharing it with the supreme chief who reigned in Rome,) a few there were, who by talent or by valour, had assisted to defend the empire from the increasing hordes of unguessed barbarians, who came pouring through the gorges of the Rhætian Alps, or from

* The persecution of the Christians, during this short reign, was an affair of party; the partisans of Philip, the rival of Decius, were Christians.

† "What in this age" (says Montesquieu) "was called the Roman empire, was only an irregular republic, not unlike the aristocracy of Algiers. Perhaps, indeed, it may be laid down as a general rule, that a military government is, in some respects, more republican than monarchical," &c.—*Considerations sur la Grandeur et la Decadence des Romains.*

the depths of the Hercynian forests, like a new creation.*

Among these enlightened but ultramontane usurpers, who, by stemming the tide of destruction, which on every side threatened the extinction of the moral government of the world, still preserved the *débris* of civilisation, were two women, of different regions and races, indeed, but characterized alike by all the qualities of temperament and mind, which distinguish womanhood in its highest physical and intellectual peculiarity;—high intuitive perception, quick feelings, devoted affections, deep-seated indignation, deathless resentments, and indomitable perseverance. They both obtained the great objects for which they aspired—justice and power for those they loved—and they both fell victims, not to their own crimes, but to their virtues. These were Victoria, the heroine of the West, and Zenobia, queen of the East.

The invasion of the empire by the Goths, towards the close of the third century, (when Claudius the second† impersonated the shadowy part of emperor, and when a succession of usurpers in the east and west assumed the purple, and disputed the power of supreme authority,) brought ruin and invasion to the gates of the capital, and induced the necessity of raising new walls for its defence, which the Romans of more prosperous ages would never have deemed necessary to protect the "seat of the empire from the inroads of barbarians."

The victory of Claudius over the Goths, and that of his immortal general and successor Aurelian over the Alemanni, restored, however, the arms of Rome to their ancient superiority over the barbarians of the north.‡ But to chastise domestic tyrants, and to re-unite the dismembered parts of the empire, was a task reserved for the second of these warlike emperors.

* Par l'evênement du monde le plus extraordinaire, Rome avait si bien anéanti tous les peuples, que, lorsqu'elle fut vaincue elle-même, il sembla que la terre en eut enfanté de nouveaux, pour la detruire.—*Montesquieu, Grandeur et Decadence des Romains*, vol. vi. p. 150.

† A.D. 270. ‡ Gibbon.

Though Aurelian, on arriving at the throne, was acknowledged by the senate and the people, the frontiers of Italy, Africa, Illyricum and Thrace, confined the limits of his reign. Gaul, Spain, and Britain, Egypt, Syria, and Asia Minor, were still possessed by rebels, who alone, out of so numerous a list, had hitherto escaped the dangers of their situation, and maintained their supremacy: "to complete the ignominy of Rome, these rival potentates were women."*

Among the rapid succession of monarchs who had previously arisen and fallen in Gaul, was Marcus Victorinus, distinguished for his valour and his political genius. He had been educated by his mother Aurelia Victoria, called "the heroine of the west;† and was associated in the empire by Posthumus, the tyrant of the Gauls." Victorinus maintained his rank and influence for five years after his elevation to the divided throne of the empire; but at length falling a victim to his private vices, he was assassinated at Cologne by "a conspiracy of jealous husbands."

Victoria, when she saw not only her son but her grandson perish, wept some natural tears; but, with the spirit of the women of her race, she dried them soon; and, instead of lamenting the murdered, flew to avenge their death, and to save the throne for Gaul, which she had rescued from the despotism of Rome. She placed herself at the head of the army, and inspired the soldiers with a confidence in her divine-righted womanhood, which induced them to acknowledge her supremacy, to obey her commands, and to give her the title of "mother of armies."

She conducted herself with that lofty pride, that firm tranquillity, which equally announce physical courage, and moral concentration, rendering her worthy of the title. She made head against Gallienus, and, in the reign of Claudius, she caused Tetricus to be elected emperor at Bordeaux, where he was yet but the governor of Acquitaine. She even for a time set the power and arms of

* Gibbon.

† Segur. Pollio assigns her an article among the thirty tyrants.—*Hist. August.* p. 200.

Aurelian at defiance, with the same dauntless spirit with which she opposed the power of Gallienus. "After the murder of so many valiant princes," (says Gibbon) "it is somewhat remarkable, that a female for a long time controlled the fierce legions of Gaul, and still more singular that she was the mother of the unfortunate Victorinus. The arms and treasures of Victoria enabled her successively to place Marius and Tetricus on the throne, and to reign with a manly vigour, under the name of those dependent emperors. Money of copper, of silver, and of gold, was coined in her name; she assumed the titles of Augusta and mother of the camps: her power ended only with her life; but her life was, perhaps, shortened by the ingratitude of Tetricus."

While the magnanimous Victoria gave away thrones, she could not give the spirit and the genius that were necessary, in times so troublous, to preserve them. She had placed "her nominee," Tetricus, over Gaul, Spain, and Britain; but he reigned the slave of a licentious army, and only delivered himself from his bondage by an act of baseness and treachery, which gained him the protection of Aurelian, and the odious suspicion of having murdered his heroic benefactress,* and betrayed his partisans.

The mysterious death of Victoria was followed by the memorable battle of Chalons in Champagne, which gave victory to Aurelian, and immortalized the treachery, cowardice, and cruelty of Tetricus.

Aurelian, acknowledged emperor from the wall of Antonine to the columns of Hercules, had now only one rebel power to contend with. The "heroine of the west" was no more! But there was still another rebel to man's despotic power to vanquish, another woman to subdue; and Aurelian, the mighty conqueror and emperor, turned his arms against "the queen of the East," the last of the thirty tyrants, who still wore the imperial purple, and retained the imperial dignity, with the title of Augusta.

* A. 171. "Victoria ne survécut que quelques mois à la nomination de ce prince; on a pretendu que Tetricus, jaloux de sa trop grande autorité, lui avait oté la vie."—*Hist. Univ.*

CHAPTER XIII.

The Women of the Empire. Zenobia.

DURING the anarchical reign and divided sway of the Emperor Gallienus, (whose father Valerian was held in captivity by "the great king," who had already humbled Rome, and was at the head of a force which recalled the armies of Artaxerxes,) a new political power suddenly sprung up amidst the sandy deserts of the East. This power, (a political phenomenon, like the produce of some sudden eruption in the natural world) was created by the energy and genius of a woman; and it swept over the hosts of the worshippers of the Sun, humbling the pride, and checking the rapid course of the haughty representatives of Cyrus and Mandane.

Amidst the most barren deserts of Arabia, there bloomed an oasis, (like some island Eden rising out of the sandy ocean) which, from the beauty and shade of its palms, bore the name of Palmyra, and which tradition assumed to have been the site of the Tadmor of King Solomon. Its pure air, its numerous springs, and fruitful soil, with its happy position, (between the gulf of Persia and the Mediterranean) had made it a halt for the caravans, which bore to Rome and to the remotest nations of its empire the rich productions of India. For the mutual commercial benefits it conferred on the Roman and Parthian empires, the little republic of the desert had been long suffered to maintain a peaceable obscurity; and it still preserved an humble neutrality, until it was suddenly raised to be the capital of an empire, and to stand forth the rival of Rome herself.

Odenatus, the brave chief of that peculiar tribe of Arabs called Saracens, who rather dwelt in than reigned over the desert regions that surround Palmyra, becoming alarmed at the approach of Sapor, sent ambassadors to the Persian

monarch, with the voluntary offer of his homage, and with costly presents to bribe his friendship. Sapor received both with contempt, threw the presents into the water, and ordered the donor to come in person, and (his hands tied behind his back,) to prostrate himself at the feet of his sovereign master.

The Arab chief writhed under the insult. But there was one for ever near him, in war or peace—in the fight, or in the chase—who urged him to avenge it! and who, pouring her "spirit into his ear,"* encouraged him to take arms against "the greatest king of the earth," to oppose his own wandering Arabs to the Persian phalanx, and fighting for his honour and independence, to conquer, or to die.

The counsel, like the enterprise, seemed more than human! But Odenatus listened to it, as though it were oracular; for it came from Zenobia, his wife, companion, and friend, the supposed descended from Semiramis and from the Ptolemies, a woman, in genius and patriotism resembling her immediate ancestress Cleopatra. "If the doubtful achievements of Semiramis be excepted," says Gibbon, "Zenobia, perhaps, was the only female, whose superior genius broke through the servile indolence imposed on her sex by the climate, the manners, (and the institutions) of Asia."

To a mind, whose resources assisted to raise her husband from a private station to a throne, she united a person, whose beauty the dryest and sternest historians have deigned to celebrate. The philosophy of Gibbon, and the scepticism of Bayle, have alike paused, while their flattered imagination lingered over pages of the personal gossipry of Pollio in which the charms of Zenobia were enumerated, from "the dark flashes of her large black eyes," to the "pearly lustre of her beautiful teeth."† Her voice, like

* Non aliter etiam, conjuge assueta quæ multorum sententiâ fortior marito fuisse perhibetur, mulierum omnium nobilissima Orientalium fœminarium, et ut Cornelius Capitolinus asserit, speciosissima.—*Trebellius Pollio in triginta Tyrannis.*

† "Oculis supra modum vigentibus, nigris, spiritus divini, venustatis incredibilis: tantus candor in dentibus, ut margaritas eam plerique puta-

her mind, was strong and harmonious, and her manly understanding, strengthened and developed by study, enabled her, in the midst of the fatigues of war and of the chase, to conquer the difficulties of the Greek, the Syriac, and the Egyptian languages; all of which she spoke with grace and purity: and, though she did not venture to converse in Latin, she was learned in every branch of its literature.

Such was Zenobia, when her counsels worked on Odenatus, and encouraged him to undertake a war, which could only be justified by its success, a success to which she mainly contributed.* Her eloquence, her beauty, and her genius, are allowed by all writers to have had a miraculous effect on the ardent temperaments and fervid spirits of the warm-blooded sons of the desert; and the Arabs of all tribes and denominations crowded to her standard, panting to resent the wrongs of the brave chief, whom she had chosen for her husband. The forces of Odenatus and Zenobia thus became so considerable as to induce the Roman legions to join them, and to make common cause against the common enemy. Zenobia, (who had inured her constitution to fatigue) disdaining to take the field in a covered carriage, (like the ladies of the Persian camp) appeared on horseback, in a military habit, and in all the brilliant panoply of war. Sometimes she descended from her Arab charger, and marched on foot for many miles across the Syrian desert, at the head of the troops. It was thus, when at the side of her husband, she first encountered the Persian army, in the plains of Mesopotamia.

The engagement that ensued was long and doubtful; but the impetuous courage of the light Arab cohorts prevailed over the ponderous unwieldy armament of "the great king." The Persians gave way; Mesopotamia, Nisiblis, and Carræ, were taken. The troops of Sapor were cut to pieces, his treasures plundered, his women

rent habere, non dentes."—*Pollio.* Eyes and teeth never had "une plus belle immortalité."

* "Elle contribua beaucoup aux grandes victoires qu'il (Odenate) remporta sur les Perses, et qui conservèrent l'orient aux Romains."—*Bayle.*

made prisoners, and Sapor himself pursued to the very walls of his gorgeous city of Ctesiphon, (the rival of Babylon,) above whose ramparts the Roman eagles and the palmy standards of Zenobia soon fluttered.*

Sapor and Zenobia are now but sounds, representing to men's minds the passing incarnations of great passions and great powers, which, sixteen centuries back, influenced the destinies and happiness of society. But, while of these splendid existences not a particle of dust remains, the local features of the grand wild scene on which they played their parts are still the same; and in their sublime durability they seem to mock the brief supremacy of self-sufficient humanity. The Diola still rolls on its tributary stream into the Tigris, as when it reflected the sunny banners of Persia, and the green standards of Palmyra. The mounds of Ctesiphon† still attract the distant gaze of the travellers of the caravan from Aleppo to Bagdad; and the plain, which spreads far and wide round the area of the ruined city, once the scene of fierce combat between the Persians and Arabians, now affords a cover to the hare and the gazelle, where they repose in peace among the fragments of extinct dynasties, and browse luxuriously on the aromatic heath, whose soil the blood of kings and heroes has ennobled.

That the success of Odenatus was, in a great measure, ascribable to the incomparable prudence and fortitude of Zenobia, is affirmed by Gibbon. "Their splendid victories over the great king," he says, "whom they twice pursued as far as the gates of Ctesiphon, laid the founda-

* Aurelian bears testimony of this fact in a letter written to the senate in the following terms. Audio, P. C. mihi objici quod non virile munus impleverim, Zenobiam triumphando. Nec illi qui me reprehendunt, satis laudarent, si scierent qualis illa est mulier quam prudens in conciliis, quam constans in dispositionibus, quam erga milites gravis, quam larga quum necessitas postulet, quam tristis quum severitas poscat. Possum dicere illius esse quod Odenatus Persas vicit. ac fugato Sapore, Ctesiphontem usque pervenit, &c.—*Trebellius Pollio in triginta Tyrannis.*

† "Ctesiphon was the second of the two cities, the grandeur of which contributed to the progressive annihilation of Babylon. It stood opposite to Seleucia, on the banks of the Tigris."—*See Excursions to the Ruins of Ctesiphon and Seleucia, in Mr. Buckingham's Travels in Mesopotamia.*

tions of their united fame and power. The armies which they commanded, and the provinces which they had saved, acknowledged not any other sovereign than these invincible chiefs. The senate and people of Rome revered the strangers who had avenged their captive emperor, and even the insensible son of Valerian accepted Odenatus for his legitimate colleague." He granted the dignity of a Roman empress to Zenobia, with the title of Augusta. These distinctions accorded by the *faineant* emperor to the saviours of his throne and power, covered the indolent Gallienus with ridicule; and enrolled Odenatus and Zenobia in the imperial list of "the thirty tyrants."

When the pacification of the East by the victories of the king and queen of Palmyra (as they were now styled) had been ratified, and when Odenatus and Zenobia, with their children and friends, were beginning to enjoy all the pleasures of domestic life, at their beautiful capital of the desert, the days and glory of Odenatus were suddenly terminated by assassination. Mæonius, his nephew, ambitious of his uncle's throne, sought to possess it by treachery and murder; and he found an opportunity, in the familiarity of private intercourse, to assassinate both him and his eldest son Herod.*

Surrounded by a feeble band of partisans, the young and unnatural assassin had scarcely assumed the title of Augustus, as a colleague of the Roman empire, when Zenobia defeated his intentions, and sacrificed the self-styled emperor to the manes of her husband and his son.†

* The story of the crime of Mæonius is variously told. Some of the accounts are confused and inconsistent. In the Augustan history, the murder of Odenatus is ascribed to a dispute between the uncle and nephew at a hunting party, in which the latter dared to dart his javelin before that of the royal sportsman.

† Herod, the son of Odenatus, was not by Zenobia. He was a young man of soft and effeminate temper, and so childish in his habits and pursuits, that his parents were wont to send him presents of gems and toys, found among the spoils of the enemy, which he received with delight. This fact proves that this illustrious stepmother did not merit the epithet of "Maratre," bestowed on her by a Greek historian; but it is remarkable that, while all the faults attributable to Zenobia are given as "on dits," her great deeds are recorded as historical truths, to which the most implacable of her enemies, as well as the most careless of her detractors, bear witness.

Supported by the faithful friends of her deceased husband, the idol of the troops, and of the people, and the pride even of the wealthy magnates of Palmyra, (to whose splendid city of palaces she had given a reflection of her own glory) Zenobia was proclaimed the successor most worthy to fill the throne of her husband. For six years she governed Palmyra, Syria, and Egypt,* with manly counsels and womanly humanity.

But she governed not for herself; she professed to rule only for the interests and during the minority of her three sons. To the first born she had given a Latin name, to the second a Greek, to the third a Syrian;† for, with an ambition that "grew with what it fed on," Zenobia, proud of her imperial title of "Augusta," and over-excited by maternal feeling, and by her own splendid success in all her enterprises, had destined her elder son to reign in Rome, her second over Greece, and her youngest over the Asiatic kingdom, of which she proudly considered herself as the foundress.

By the death of Odenatus, that imperial title and authority was at an end, which the senate had granted him only as a personal distinction. "But his martial widow, disdaining both the senate and the Emperor Gallienus, obliged one of the Roman generals who was sent against her, to retreat into Europe, with the loss of his army and of his reputation;" and increased her power by the defeat of those from whom it was derived.

Raised by high motives and ennobling pursuits above all the petty passions which so frequently perplex a female reign, even more than foreign adversaries, the steady administration of Zenobia was guarded by the most judicious maxims of prudent policy. "If it was expedient to pardon, she could calm her resentment: if it was necessary to punish, she could impose silence on the voice of pity.

* Non seulement elle conserva les provinces qui avaient été sous l'obéissance d'Odenat, mais elle conquit aussi l'Egypte, et se préparait à d'autres conquêtes, lorsque l'Empereur Aurelien lui alla faire la guerre.—*Bayle.*

† Herenneanus, Timolaus, and Vaballath. It was thus that Catherine of Russia created "foregone conclusions" in favour of her grandsons.

Her strict economy was accused of avarice: yet on every proper occasion she appeared magnificent and liberal. The neighbouring states of Arabia, Armenia, and Persia, dreaded her enmity, and solicited her alliance. To the dominions of Odenatus, which extended from the Euphrates to the frontiers of Bithynia, his widow added the inheritance of her ancestors, the populous and fertile kingdom of Egypt. The Emperor Claudius acknowledged her merit, and was content that, while he pursued the Gothic war, she should assert the dignity of the empire in the East."

The conduct, however, of Zenobia was said to have been "attended with some ambiguity;" nor is it unlikely that she had conceived the design of erecting an independent and hostile monarchy: for she blended with the popular manners of Roman princes the stately pomp of the courts of Asia, and exacted from her subjects the same adoration that was paid to the successors of Cyrus. "She bestowed on her three sons a Latin education, and often showed them to the troops adorned with the imperial purple. For herself she reserved the diadem, with the splendid but doubtful title of 'Queen of the East.'"*

During this happiest and most glorious epoch of her life, she gave herself up to the most intellectual occupations. She had drawn up for her own use an epitome of oriental history, (for history she was wont to say was "the true science of kings,") and she familiarly compared the beauties of Homer and Plato, under the tuition of her preceptor and first minister, the well-known Greek writer, Longinus. No contemporary sovereign is represented as being capable of such high pursuits; nor did any sovereign of any time select a wiser or more illustrious minister; nor any

* Gibbon. "Mêlant à-propos la douceur," (says one of the latest historians who have borne testimony to the wise reign of one of the feebler sex,) "mêlant à-propos la douceur et la sévérité, prodigue d'or et d'honneurs pour ceux qui servaient ses desseins, elle égala en habileté les plus grands rois. Amie des lettres, elle honora de sa compagnie, et combla de faveurs le celèbre Longin, qui trouva souvent dans le genie de cette reine le modéle du sublime qu'il nous apprit à connaitre.—*Segur, Hist. Univ.*

minister ever serve a more enlightened or judicious sove reign, of either sex.

But, while on one side Zenobia devoted herself to Pagan learning, and loaded with wealth and favours the most eminent Pagan writer of the age, she was not only suspected of professing the Jewish doctrines, and of favouring its writers, but at the same time she entered freely into the religious quarrels by which the Christians at the close of the third century were beginning to impede the progress of their own great cause. Zenobia, herself a platonist, was well adapted to comprehend the mysteries and subtilties with which the contending Christian councils were mingling the pure and simple moralities of Christ; and the queen of the East, in the midst of her complicated duties and pursuits, political and literary, became, in her miraculous versatility, the protectress of Paul of Samosata, Bishop of Antioch, against the synodical persecutions of the council of Antioch: the bishop was accused of adopting the heresy of Artemon, a doctrine which Zenobia was suspected of peculiarly favouring.*

From occupations so ennobling, and so spiritual, the philosophic legislatress of Palmyra was suddenly drawn off, by the astounding intelligence of the immediate expedition of the emperor Aurelian into Asia, who, after his victories in the west, and death of Victoria, was resolved on turning the whole force of his prowess against the Queen of the East.

Aurelian (the successor of the feeble Claudius II.), one of the bravest, fiercest, and most invincible of Rome's barbarian emperors, was the offspring of a Pannonian peasant, and of a frail and inferior priestess of the sun. He had owed the fortunes of his private life, and the glory

* "St. Athanase dit qu'elle étoit juive, ce qu' Abulfarage écrit après lui, mais au moins elle suivoit beaucoup les sentimens des Juifs, et on prétend que ce fut à cause d'elle, que Paul de Samosate, évêque d'Antioche, duquel elle étoit protectrice, tomba dans l'héresie d'Artémon, dont les sentimens touchant Jésus Christ approchaient fort de ceux de la synagogue." De Tillemont, cited by Bayle, who, however, adds:—Pour persuader aux gens qu'elle étoit juive de religion, il faudroit qu'il alléguât d'autres témoignages.—*Dict. Art. Zenobie.*

of his public career, to his matchless valour and unconquerable energies, qualities which eventually raised him from a common soldier to the throne of the empire. The reputation of having killed with his own hand nine hundred enemies, marks his bravery and ferocity. But the severe and rigid nerve of the soldier rarely yielded to the sympathy of the man; and the judge who sustained without emotion the sight of the most dreadful tortures, and inflicted the cruelest deaths, mistook that for a virtue, which was only the irresistible propensity to cruelty, of one defective in all the higher and softer qualities which spiritualize man.

His piety was also an extreme: and it was marked by the grossest superstition: still his devotion to the god of light, (which the "fortunate peasant" had imbibed with the milk of his mother's bosom,) was the only sentiment in which some tincture of an imaginative feeling brightened the density of his rigid organization.

The temple raised on the Quirinal Hill to his own tutelar deity, irradiated with gold and jewels, is said never to have been surpassed, even by those altars which now glorify the same site, in that Christian temple, which is unrivalled in beauty and magnificence. Firm of purpose, and endowed with great powers of mental concentration, the unlettered soldier was yet destitute of all the ordinary advantages of education; and his laconic and characteristic epistles are said to have been so interlarded with the idiom of the camp, as to be scarcely intelligible to those uninitiated in the military rhetoric of the age.

After having put an end to the Gothic war, severely chastised the Germans, and recovered Gaul, Spain, and Britain out of the hands of the unfortunate Tetricus, Aurelian resolved on destroying another proud monarchy, erected on the ruins of the Roman empire in Asia. But above all, he resolved on humbling the pride of the conqueress of Persia and of Egypt, the one sole surviving opponent of Rome and its victorious emperor, the as yet unconquered and irresistible Zenobia.

Having established some legislative regulations, (useful,

indeed, and expedient, but marked with the impression of his fearful severity,) having fortified Rome, so recently invaded by the barbarians, (extending its boundaries, and raising its walls,) Aurelian was free to execute his great and darling design; and he left Italy, to give battle to Zenobia, who, since her recent conquests of Egypt, had crowned her eldest son, and given him the title of a "Roman emperor."

Aurelian triumphed over every obstacle by which a barbarian enemy impeded his progress; and, fighting his way through Sclavonia, Thrace, and Byzantium, poured down upon Asia Minor, at the head of an army mighty even for Rome.

From the moment of his departure on this expedition, there was obviously a rapid recklessness in all his movements; and his violence, or his lenity, as he proceeded in his career of conquest, or of forgiveness, was marked with an obvious impatience, as if some greater glory was yet to be achieved, than the submission of Bithynia, and the capture of Ancyra. Even the unexpected mercy with which he treated the countrymen of Apollonius the philosopher, his mildness to the unpunished inhabitants of Antioch, were an anomaly in the conduct of the most relentless of conquerors and of men. By thus conciliating the confidence of the Syrians, his salutary edicts brought him more quickly to the gates of Emesa, within a hundred miles of Palmyra.

"Aurelian would have disdained to confess, that he had passed into Asia, solely to meet face to face the victorious heroine, whose sex alone could have rendered her an object of contempt:" yet that the conquest of Zenobia was the object of this expedition, history has left no doubt.

The queen of the East would have ill deserved her reputation for vigilance and forethought, had she indolently permitted the emperor of the west to approach within a hundred miles of her capital, without taking such precautions as were characteristic of an able general, and a profound stateswoman. A part of her army, therefore, were promptly stationed along the shores of the Orontes, near

Antioch. Aurelian attacked and put it to flight, by a stratagem worthy of his profound military experience; and Zenobia (undismayed) waited his approach in the plains of Emesa, at the head of seventy thousand men-at-arms. This force she animated by her presence and her eloquence, while she devolved the execution of her orders to her general in chief, Zabdas, who had signalized his valour in the conquest of Egypt.

Conspicuous by the splendour of her staff, (to use the military phrase of modern times) but more conspicuous by her own lofty deportment and unrivalled beauty, the Queen of the East appeared mounted on an Arab steed, uniting in her person and dress all that was at once characteristic of the woman, the sovereign, and the warrior. Her rich robe was surmounted by armour of solid gold, studded with jewels; her plumed helmet was bound by a royal diadem of costly gems; and her right arm was bared to the elbow, that she might be free to wield the flashing lance, borne in her firm grasp.

It was thus she presented herself to the most formidable of her enemies, (but the most passionate of her admirers and eulogists.) Her brilliant army was for the most part composed of light archers, with a cavalry habited in an armour of complete and polished steel. But troops of Arabs, fleet, quick, and intelligent, (as their descendants, who at no distant day from the battle of Emesa kindled the light of mind in Europe, and then disappeared like the genii of their own bright fables,) perpetually hovered round the queen of their deserts, in desultory bands. Thus they were enabled to harass the more disciplined and rigid legions of the Roman army, in their march over the desert.

Aurelian drew up in the plain of Emesa, at the head of a mighty armament, principally composed of the veteran troops whose fierce valour had been well tried in the Allemanic wars. This dense stern body was flanked by a swarthy phalanx of Moorish and Illyrian horse. All the prowess of a Roman army, led by its emperor, (and that emperor the conqueror of half the world,) lent its effect to the brightest battle-field the sun had ever shone on! Before

this scene, its masses, groupings, and foreground figures, the imagination pauses, in the gratification of its highest enjoyments; and, until the fixedness of the rival armies was broken up by the war-word of their commanders,* they, too, may have paused and gazed upon each other, with an interest, whose expression no art could seize, nor poetry embody.

Aurelian and Zenobia may have now met, for the first time, face to face, lance to lance, the Augustus and Augusta of that disputed world, which they had hitherto divided between them. They met in the splendid region, where, we are told, God first created man, and gave him woman to be an help and a mate unto him; and they represented in their own persons and organization, those respective attributes, by which the sexes, through the awful sweep of five thousand years, had been distinctly and severally characterized and governed.

Zenobia, in her intellectual aspirations and maternal impulses, was the champion of moral force and human affections—fighting the battle of mind and country, for her children, and for philosophy; Aurelian warred to establish the right of might, to place power on its broadest basis, to raise tyranny to its extremest point, and to check the inroads of reform, by the resistance of military prowess!

The destiny of an empire, and through that empire of the world, was thus placed at the issue of a single battle, which was long, bloody, and terrible on both sides. The onset of Zenobia was a woman's charge, petulant and brilliant; and the heavy Moorish and Illyrian cavalry of the imperial army were unable to sustain its shock, and suddenly gave way.

Aurelian, indignant at the success of this female general, attacked the Palmyrians with fury; but Zenobia en-

* At Emesa. The Temple of the Sun at Emesa was that at whose altars Heliogabalus had served. Gibbon observes that Zenobia was present both at the battles of Antioch and Emesa, "animating," he says, the armies by her presence. Vopiscus mentions only the second.—*Hist. August.*

couraged her troops by her spirit and her eloquence. The imperial infantry had already exhausted their quivers, and fled in real or affected disorder; the imprudent victors, when exhausted in the pursuit, were, in their turn, discomfited in a desultory combat: the stratagem won the day for Rome. Zenobia, routed, but not discouraged, made an able retreat upon Palmyra, and secured her remaining forces within its walls. Making every preparation for a vigorous resistance, and addressing the citizens and soldiers of her capital with her usual intrepidity, telling them "that the last moment of her life should be that of her reign,"—she awaited the enemy.

Aurelian followed close upon the retreating army; but, in his march between Emesa and Palmyra, suffered much from the guerilla warfare of the harassing Arabs, whose light and fugitive troops watched the fit moment of surprise, and eluded the slow pursuit of the more disciplined, but less active Roman legions. Arrived before Palmyra, the emperor found that its siege would be an object far more difficult and important than he or his most experienced generals had contemplated.

Aurelian pressed the attacks in person with incessant vigour; and it may be that the view of the fairy palace of the Queen of the East, gleaming through the palms of its gardens, stimulated his efforts. It is possible that they may have fixed his gaze, at the moment when an arrow, winged from the walls, reached his person, and inflicted a deep wound; and it was, probably, while rankling under this infliction, that he wrote to the senate his memorable despatch, which, in defending his own delays, and the protraction of the siege, has immortalized the genius and prowess of his enemy.

"The Roman people," says Aurelian, "speak with contempt of the war which I am waging against a woman. They are ignorant both of the character and of the power of Zenobia. It is impossible to enumerate her warlike preparations of stones, of arrows, and every species of missile weapons. Every part of the walls is provided with two or three balistæ; and artificial fires are thrown from

her military engines. The fear of punishment has armed her with a desperate courage. Yet, still I trust in the protecting deities of Rome, who have hitherto been favourable to all my undertakings."

Notwithstanding, however, this pious confidence, Aurelian became so doubtful of the event of the siege, that he judged it most prudent to propose terms of an advantageous capitulation. He offered to the queen a splendid retreat, and to the citizens, their ancient privileges. Zenobia rejected his offer, accompanying her refusal with irony. Her letter, addressed to the emperor himself, breathed a spirit worthy of a hero, and a patriot. Its superscription was "Zenobia, Queen of the East, to Aurelian Augustus."

"It is not," (she observes) "by writing, but by arms, that the submission you require from me can be obtained. You have dared to propose my surrender to your prowess. But you forget that Cleopatra preferred death to servitude. The Saracens, the Persians, the Armenians, are marching to my aid, and how are you to resist our united forces, who have been more than once scared by the plundering Arabs of the desert? When you shall see me march at the head of my allies, you will not repeat an insolent proposition, as though you were already my conqueror and master."

This haughty reply silenced the hopes of Aurelian, and sharpened his resentments. He attacked Palmyra with fresh vigour, but he failed to triumph either over the obstinate bravery of the garrison, or the indomitable spirit of the queen.

Informed of the approach of the Persians, the emperor marched against them, and challenged them to a pitched battle; but the enormous sums of money by which he bribed the Saracens and Armenians to defection, are thought to have served his cause more powerfully, than the arms of his legions.

Palmyra, thus deprived of the aid of her natural allies, and disheartened by the death of Sapor, was further weakened by a famine and fearful mortality! The possibility of further resistance was at an end. The rich mag-

nates of the magnificent Palmyra were not superior to the desire of saving their splendid palaces, even at the expense of their national independence; and all were ready to surrender. But the firmness of Zenobia still held out. Supported by the expectation that eventually famine must compel the Roman army to repass the desert, encouraged by the councils of her minister Longinus, and animated by her hopes and fears for her children, their safety, and their fortunes, she refused to surrender.

The valour and perseverance of Aurelian, however, overcame every obstacle. From every part of Syria, "a regular convoy safely arrived in the Roman camp, which was increased by the return of Probus with his victorious troops from the reconquest of Egypt." It was then, when all was lost save her own honour, that Zenobia resolved to escape the ignominy of a capture, and to fly. Two of her youthful sons were no more; but she had provided for the safety of her two daughters, and of her younger boy Vaballath, as is proved by their having long survived the disastrous day, which rose upon the captivity of Palmyra.

Zenobia, mounted on the fleetest of her dromedaries, directed her flight to the Euphrates, (sixty miles from Palmyra,) and reached its shores in safety, with the intention of passing into Persia, and claiming protection from her new allies. She had escaped from Palmyra under the shadows of evening. Miraculously eluding the vigilance of the Roman outposts, she arrived, (probably by the wondrous fleetness of the dromedary,)* in the early morning, at that point of the mighty river, beneath and above which, a tunnel and a bridge were supposed to have connected the two royal palaces of Babylon, which stood on either side.

But of the "golden city," the "lady of kingdoms," "the beauty of the Chaldee's excellency,"† what remained to raise the spirit and cheer the hopes of the

* The Arabs affirm that the dromedary or camel will run over as much ground in one day as horses can perform in eight or ten.—*Buffon.*

† Isaiah.

fugitive descendant of its foundress? The Euphrates then, as now,* rolled on majestically through mounds of ruins and hills of rubbish, which once were temples, palaces, and gardens, "gates of brass," and "broad walls," (the all that remained of "the glory of kingdoms," "the praise of the whole earth.") The fragments of its "pleasant palaces" were already, in the words of the prophet, "the possessions of the bittern, and doleful creatures;" and the presence of the last and lonely representative of Semiramis may have startled them from their lairs, on a spot where "the Arabian ventured not to pitch his tent."

One great fragment existed then (and still exists) rising above all, which Alexander had gazed on with wonder and envy—the tower of Belus!—a fragment, which, taken with all the poetry of desolation that surrounded it, may have first brought home to the bosom of the Queen of the East a conviction and a feeling, to which much of her after conduct might be attributable! What, indeed, was Palmyra to Babylon? and what was the end and object of the highest aspirations of mere vainglorious and personal ambition? The mounds of Babylon, and the formless fragments of the tower of Belus, were sublime and ready answers!

It was in this scene, so humiliating to the last great foundress of an empire in the East, that Zenobia may have fully awakened from the false dreams of glory, and felt how far beyond their highest accomplishments were the affections of Nature! All the mother may then have superseded the high excitements of the potentate; and the queen, who had so lately, in the flushed spirit of her heroism and of her disappointed vengeance, resolved on self-destruction, may have here first conceived the idea of a far more difficult sacrifice: she may have resolved to live: for, Zenobia, unlike Cleopatra, though defeated and bereaved, had yet something to live for—her children!†

* Pliny.

† In discovering the doubtful *cui bono* of all things, Zenobia may have well despised the pride of stoicism, and its ostentatious display of un-

The bark which was to convey her over the Euphrates into the land of her allies, was already touching the shore, when a corps of Roman cavalry, sent in her pursuit by Aurelian, arrived on the spot; and Zenobia, when on the point of embarking, was seized and brought prisoner to the imperial head-quarters.

That a change had come over the mind and spirits of Zenobia, in this most awful epoch of her life, was testified by her conduct and manner from the moment of her captivity; for a calm and passionless dignity from thenceforth is said to have marked her deportment. Aurelian, whose little mind and great revenge had stomach for every species of mortifying insult, could not restrain his impetuous tauntings, when she first appeared in his tent. Suddenly bursting forth, with all the brutality of the Illyrian peasant, and the abruptness of the despotic soldier, he asked her, "how she, a woman, had dared to oppose the power of man, her lord and master; and, above all, to set herself up in authority against the unity and supremacy of Rome and its mighty emperors!"

The answer of Zenobia was adroit and womanly, at once firm and respectful:—"I acknowledge you alone," (she said) "as worthy of the title of emperor; but for your predecessors Gallienus and Claudius, they were unworthy of a throne, which they permitted to be overthrown, and which I upheld and saved for them."

To this fact, to which Aurelian himself had borne testimony, he replied by referring to a council of war the fate of the captive queen and her partisans; although he had already in his omnipotence decided, that she should live to grace his triumph, and to be humbled by his clemency!

The Roman soldiers, however, in their brutal fury, opposed themselves to the edict of their emperor: they cried aloud and with furious yells for the life of Zenobia. The emperor with difficulty resisted the demands of these

natural insensibility; and have preferred living for her family, to dying for the sake of a name. This heroism, far greater than an act of self-destruction, has however been brought against her to prove that, "as female fortitude is commonly artificial, so it is seldom steady or consistent."—*Gibbon.*

tyrants over all tyrants, who panted to tear his illustrious prisoner to pieces; and he was compelled to offer to them, as an expiatory victim, her counsellor and minister, the immortal Longinus, whom he himself affected to consider as the responsible adviser of the daring resistance which Zenobia had made to his own power and prowess. The woman, however, who, at the head of a band of Arabs, had taken the field against the Persians, wanted no other counsellor than her own brave spirit, to impel her to the defence of the kingdom she had founded, against the ambitious aggression even of Aurelian himself.

Longinus, the sublime philosopher, the zealous minister, the devoted friend, was led forth to a public execution, by order of the conquerer of his sovereign and disciple, Aurelian; and still farther to glut the brutal ferocity of the savage soldiers, the greatest writer of his age, (whose glorious works are still raising the human mind in its own consideration) was permitted to be tortured to death. The current of the *Latte della Lupa* was still running strong in the Roman temperament, when Aurelian and his victorious legions could gloat over the lingering agonies and palpitating fibres of one, whose death, like his life, had illustrated the great sublime he drew.*

That Longinus perished the victim of his zeal for Zenobia, there can be no doubt; but that his miserable fate was due to her weakness or ingratitude, there is no proof. The feeble and unsupported suppositions of the writers, who have furnished modern historians with their philippics against Zenobia, are not worthy of confidence, when weighed against the undeniable facts of her life and character, and against the well-known cruelty and avenging temperament of Aurelian. Successful sovereigns have always had laudatory historiographers, and Aurelian had his; but the defeated and unfortunate Zenobia had no faithful chronicler to tell her story, and to make her defence. He, whose genius she honoured, and who best

* "Without uttering a complaint, he calmly followed the executioner, pitying his unhappy mistress, and bestowing comfort on his afflicted friends."—*Gibbon.*

knew her motives, would have best written her history, and that of the times she lived in, had he not perished prematurely by a cruel death. He died not, however, as has been written, "the innocent victim of his sovereign's fears," but the selected victim of the unlettered tyrant, who, in punishing the uncompromising minister, was "incapable of being moved by the genius and the learning, which had served equally to harmonize and elevate the souls of Longinus and Zenobia."

The insignificant retailer of the *on-dits* of this dark and illiterate epoch of antiquity, Vopiscus, who took Aurelian as the subject of one of his historical romances,* is the authority quoted by a modern, who is himself a great authority, for the supposition that Zenobia "ignominiously purchased her own life, by the sacrifice of her fame and friends." But what were the "friends" of the bereaved and conquered Zenobia to her imperial rival and conqueror? Had he not the Queen of the East, the last of the thirty tyrants, the "Augusta," who had disputed the empire with him in his power?—and how was she compelled to offer such a price for her own life, as the lives of her friends, when to preserve that life, for the illustration of his own vainglorious triumph, (the matchless

* Flavius Vopiscus, in the reign of Dioclesian, composed the history of Aurelian, and of some of his immediate successors, which ekes out the not very authentic compilation of the Augustan history. The negative eulogium passed on Vopiscus by a modern French critic, is worth citing: "Quoique ce n'est pas un bon auteur, il est cependant moins mauvais que tous les autres, dont on a fait une compilation pour composer," l'Historiæ Augustæ Scriptores. Zosimus (the other author, who furnishes Gibbon with references against Zenobia, was a Greek writer of the fifth or sixth century, of whom little is known, except that he wrote a history of the empire from Augustus to Dioclesian. He was a zealous supporter of the old church of Paganism, and he could not, therefore be very favourable to the philosophical pupil of Longinus, who favoured the Jews, and protected a Christian bishop: "Car il voyait avec peine s'établir sur les ruines de la religion de ses pères celle des chrétiens; et de cette opinion peu reflechie, et de son zèle pour sa religion, naissent des traits de partialité, dont on peut excuser l'homme, mais non pas l'historien!" Such were the historians on whose opinions Gibbon formed his own idea of Zenobia's latter conduct. Longinus and Zenobia, (had such scribblers written in their times,) would have laughed at opinions thus hazarded, on events so far removed from the scrutiny of the calumnious inditers.

pearl that was to give lustre to the victor's crown) was the ambition and fondest hope of Aurelian's pride and policy?

After the conquest of Palmyra, and the suppression of the rebellion in Egypt, followed the well-known triumphal entry of Aurelian into Rome; and "since the foundation of Rome," (says the great historian of its decline and fall,) "no general had more nobly deserved a triumph than Aurelian, nor was a triumph ever celebrated with superior pride and magnificence." So long and various, indeed, was the pomp of this ceremony, that though it began with the dawn, it was still winding its gorgeous way to the capitol, amidst the shadows of twilight; and the great hero of the mighty melo-drama did not reach his palace till it was dark. The multitudinous people rent the air with acclamations, the expression of their "unfeigned joy, wonder, and gratitude."

The pomp opened with an unwieldy procession of four royal tigers, twenty elephants, and two hundred wild and curious animals, the produce of every clime and region of the north, east, and south. These grim and most fearful images of brute force in all its most reckless savagery, were followed close, by sixteen hundred men, formed in the pride of Nature's finest type, who were then wending their melancholy way to horrid immolation. Chosen for their strength and symmetry to grace the triumph, they were destined with the morning's light to be torn to pieces by the wild beasts, in whose track they now followed,—for the amusement of the Roman people, and the glory of their emperor. The victims thus set apart from the lists of humanity, were stigmatized with the name of Gladiators; but they were, nevertheless, men: men such as the chisel of the noblest of all the arts has recorded them, for the wonder and admiration of posterity.*

Close upon this frightful spectacle, so calculated to strike terror and pity upon every heart, came the chariots that were loaded with the spolia opima;—an evidence of

* The Dying Gladiator of the Capitol.

the gorgeous puerility and mean ambition of the worshipped gods and tyrants of Rome. They consisted of the plundered wealth of Asia, and the arms and ensigns of the conquered nations, who had vainly struggled for independence against superior force. But amidst these spoils of war, there was one sumpter-chariot loaded with household elegancies, with articles of royal and domestic magnificence, gold and silver plate of Greek and Indian workmanship, carpets of Persia, and urns of Egypt, chairs of ivory and ewers gemmed with precious stones. All these were piled together, in artful disorder.

The Roman people must have gazed on these monuments of a barbarian civilisation with envy and wonder; while the eyes of the female portion of the multitude may have moistened, as, amidst this gorgeous splendour of the palace-home of the Queen of the East,* they discovered even her very wardrobe, her rich Syrian tunics, her Persian diadem, and imperial mantle: for such was the meanness of the conqueror, "who so nobly deserved a triumph," that the minutest articles of Zenobia's toilet were exposed to the popular gaze. Perhaps, too, in derision of the pedantic woman, her golden stylus, and the rolls on which she had written her "History of the East," together with the works of Longinus,† whose preservation, above all others, posterity would most have coveted, may have been among these precious spoils.

After these came the ambassadors from the remotest parts of the earth, from Ethiopia, China, Persia, Arabia, India, and Bactriana; their rich and picturesque dresses were called in to aid the scenic effect, and their own pre-

* Zenobia aimait le faste, et voulait que sa cour égalât en splendeur celle des rois de Perse.—*Hist. Univer., Segur.*

† These were at that time voluminous, though now reduced to the single treatise on the sublime. Longinus was named "the living library." His "Treatise on the Sublime" was found in an old monastic library at Bale, in 1554, by François Rohentel. The world probably owes the loss of his "Critical Remarks on the Greek Authors," to the barbarian plunder of Aurelian's soldiers, when they took Palmyra, or to the paltry vengeance of the emperor after he had put the illustrious author to death.

sence in Rome was employed to confirm the fame and power of the emperor!

Crowns of gold, too, "the offerings of grateful cities," which Aurelian had plundered and depopulated, and other offerings from nations he had enslaved, equally grateful, relieved the eye, between the passage of these living tributes to his glory. Then came the train of captives, who best attested the great northern victories of Aurelian, warriors of a new creation, the free children of the forests, the wild sons of the mountain and the hill. Often defeated, but never subdued or exterminated, their races continued to pour forth from age to age, in increasing multitudes, and with deathless energies, till Rome and all her greatness was trampled under their victorious steps. These were the Franks, the Gauls, the Sarmatians, and the Vandals, each tribe distinguished by its peculiar standards and inscriptions.

On one of these banners was emblazoned "the Amazons," a name given in irony, or in policy, to a little band of women, remarkable for their heroic beauty, who had been taken with arms in their hands, fighting at their husband's sides: "for among barbarian nations, women have often been found so fighting,"—a violence, indeed, done to Nature, but done by Nature herself, and sanctified by the circumstances.

The unfortunate Emperor Tetricus* followed,—the representative of her, who made him emperor, of Victoria, "the heroine of the west." But every eye, disregarding all the other captives, was strained to catch the first glimpse of the greater than all!—the Roman Augusta—the rival of Aurelian—the Queen of the East! She appeared at last, on foot, preceding her own magnificent chariot, the triumphal car in which she had once hoped to enter the gates of Rome as its empress mother! Her beautiful figure was fettered by pondrous manacles of gold, and the chains

* Tetricus was accompanied by his son. They were both in the Gallic costume, trowsers, a saffron tunic, and a purple mantle: this is one of the earliest notices of French fashions on record.

which encircled her neck were so weighty, that a slave walked beside her to support them, as she moved in the majesty of her humiliation. She seemed almost to faint under the weight of the jewels, with which her enfeebled, yet queen-like person, was decorated and encumbered. Not so her conqueror, who followed her steps in a triumphal car, drawn by four elephants:

> "Aloft, in awful state,
> The godlike hero sate—"

the crowned "Deus" and "Dominus"* of a new species of worship.

The senate, the people, and the army, closed the procession: but, amidst their shouts of joy, some symptoms of discontent were manifested by the "conscript fathers," who, in their *esprit de corps*, as men and magistrates, could not suppress a rising murmur, when the haughty emperor thus exposed to ignominy a Roman and a magistrate, in the person of the ex-emperor Tetricus. For the Roman empress, however, who much more than shared this "ignominy," there was no sympathy! None at least was openly demonstrated: though among the women some proud-feeling hearts may have swelled, as this noble creature, this faithful wife, this devoted mother, this spirited queen, trod her doleful way to the capitol in chains, where she was so worthy to be crowned.

They may have even felt their own wrongs in hers, and wept as they gazed on the fallen greatness of this glory of their sex; and if one man of genius, or of learning, mingled with the brute mass of a degraded population, he, too, may have considered the intellectual queen, the friend of Longinus, the lover of science and philosophy, with a far other sentiment, than that, which he was forced to affect, in lavishing loud vivats on the

* See the medals of Aurelian. Such homage had been rejected with abhorrence by the first Cæsars; but the title of "our lord and emperor" was given by the people, and accepted by the later sovereigns.

hero, whose glory was founded on the destruction and misery of the species!

On this great occasion, the moral triumph was the woman's; the gorgeous and theatrical solemnity was her master's! Posterity must now judge between them; but it is a remarkable feature in this triumph, granted to a hero, that it opened with tigers, and ended with slaves.

It had been customary, upon all such occasions, to strangle those princes who had unsuccessfully opposed the Roman arms, in the defence of their own thrones and freedom; and their execution was perpetrated as soon as the triumphal pomp had ascended the steps of the capitol. It was the wiser lenity of the Emperor Aurelian to spare the lives of the two unfortunate sovereigns he had defeated, and to permit Tetricus and Zenobia to enjoy an honourable repose. Aurelian presented Zenobia with an elegant villa at Tivoli, in place of the kingdom he had ravaged from her.

Thither she retired with her two daughters and her son, elevated, not degraded, to the rank of a Roman matron; and if the ruins of Babylon and the deserted palaces of Palmyra may sometimes have recurred to her, amidst the pleasant paradise of Tivoli, the affections of Nature must have compensated her for the extinction of that false grandeur, which her ambition had led her to seek, at the expense of her happiness and repose. She had taken Semiramis and Cleopatra for the models of the heroic portions of her life: like the first, she had legislated and reformed; while, like the second, she had carried on the tradition of mind by her encouragement of the learned; and, like both, her moral energies fell only before that physical force which then governed the universal world! In her latter days the Queen of the East emulated the virtues of Cornelia, and may have recalled them to the Romans by her example and her life. Her intellectual posterity, illustrating a new phasis of society in the fifth century,* bore

* Zenobius, Bishop of Florence, in the time of St. Ambrose, is supposed by Baronius to have been a descendant of the Queen of Palmyra.

evidence to the most ancient of all dogmas—that great and good mothers are the true foundresses of the dynasties of genius. They were so in the great days of Israel; and they were so in the best days of Rome.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Women of the Empire. Valeria. Theodora. Prisca. Helena.

THE magnificent triumph accorded by the Roman army and people to the most warlike and fortunate of emperors, was quickly followed by his assassination! The pride of Aurelian had long been offensive to the senate; his cruelty was feared by all the most illustrious families of Rome, who suffered from its exercise; and his ignorant and haughty impatience of all civil institutions, evinced his intention of governing by the sword that empire, which he vauntingly asserted he had won by the sword!

The greatest general, and the worst politician of his time, Aurelian was better fitted to command an army, than to govern a state; and the acts of severity with which he filled up the short interval between his triumphal entry into the capital and his departure from it for the East, were abhorrent to policy, to justice, and humanity. "The executioners were fatigued, the prisons were crowded, and the unhappy senate lamented the death or absence of its most illustrious members."

The excuse for this severity was an insurrection of the workmen of the mint;*—its excesses, the result of his own cruel temperament, to which the excitement of shedding blood was a necessary indulgence. Five months

* One of the earliest *strikes* on record.

after his "triumph," when on his march near Byzantium, he fell a victim to a military and domestic conspiracy, and was murdered by the hands of one of his own generals, whom he had most trusted.

The close of the third century found the Roman world a prey to a ferocious soldiery, to sanguinary tyrants, and to the perpetual incursions of those brave and reckless barbarians, whose conquests over existing civilisation were about to change the whole condition of society. From time to time, some few great individuals appeared upon the blood-stained arena of the empire, who, by their military skill, high discipline, and dauntless spirits, upheld its greatness. They were chiefly military adventurers from the warlike province of Illyrium. After the death of the good and wise Tacitus, (the descendant of the historian, and successor of Aurelian,) the peasantry of that province, "who had already given Claudius and Aurelian to the sinking empire," had an equal right to glory in the elevation of Probus, whose victories over the barbarians of all nations, relieved Rome from its most pressing dangers, and raised its proud eagles once more, on the shores of the remotest rivers of the north.

The great legislative talents of Probus would have been equally beneficial to the ruined people as his conquests, had they been permitted to have taken effect; but his imprudence in neglecting to court that military popularity, by which the wisest, like the worst, were destined to be governed, deprived Rome of one of the best of her emperors. Probus, while superintending in person the draining of the marshes of Sirmium, (more attentive to the interests of mankind than to the indulgence of his troops,) was urging on the soldiers employed in the task, when they suddenly broke forth into a furious mutiny, and attacked his person. He flew for refuge to a lofty tower, but fled in vain. The tower was forced, and a thousand swords were plunged into the bosom of him, who, a moment before, these slaves and tyrants had honoured as a god, and addressed as their "lord."

A new reign, as usual, was followed by a new murder.

The ambiguous death of the short-lived and excellent Emperor Carius, made way for his eldest son Carinus, who added the vices of Heliogabalus to the cruelty of Domitian. At the moment when he was about to kindle the flames of civil war in Rome, he, too, fell in his turn a victim to private vengeance; having been murdered by a tribune, whose wife he had seduced.

The glorious and protracted reign of Diocletian, which followed, gave breathing time to exhausted humanity, and again left an opening in the dark vista of anarchical story, through which the light of woman's mind shone forth,—faintly, indeed, but still steadily. The birth of one of the greatest emperors which Rome ever possessed, was as abject as his character was elevated. His mother was a slave in the family of a noble Roman senator; and the name of his father must have been at least doubtful, since the son took for his own one derived from the little town of his mother's birth and parentage—Diocles, or Dioclea, in Dalmatia.

That the freedom of the parents had been obtained, was proved by the son's being permitted to take the profession of arms. From that moment, he forced his way to fortune and to fame, by every species of merit best calculated to obtain success, till he ascended the throne of the empire, and at a time when such an occupant was most necessary to save it from sinking.

The genius which raised the son of a slave to the empire of the world, still presided over the great reign of Diocletian; and from his elevation to the throne, to his voluntary abdication, almost every act was marked as the unprecedented experiment of a great and original mind. His early introduction of a new form of administration, his early association of Maximian into the government, and his adoption of two younger colleagues, which gave to Rome two Augusti and two Cæsars at the same time, was followed by the well distributed departments of the elder and younger imperial chiefs, and by the harmony and union of all. This union which cemented their power, notwithstanding the greatest dissonance of charac-

ter and disparity of talents, was among the moral miracles effected by one, who, though born a slave, taught the world that Nature knows no distinction in the distribution of her favours.

Maximian, whom Diocletian had associated in his own supreme power, was a brave, ignorant, and illiterate peasant, a gallant and disciplined soldier, who well justified by his stature, strength, and volition, the mythical name, bestowed on him by his imperial patron—that of "Augustus-Herculius." For himself, Diocletian took the godlike title of Jovius. The two epithets, if intended to represent the elements of brute force inherent in one, and the high endowment of reason and moral government in the other, were respectively applicable to two men, so dissimilar, and yet so well associated for the interests of the times.

The two younger Cæsars who were called on to share in the labours of a government, which was still that of the world, were Galerius, who had been raised from the pastoral profession of a herdsman, to be the victorious general of an army; and Constantius, whose gentler birth and nobler character were derived from his illustrious mother Eutropia, the niece of the Emperor Claudius.

To strengthen the bonds of this political union, by ties of a tenderer nature, the two reigning emperors, Diocletian and Maximian, adopted each, one of their new associates as his son. Diocletian assumed the character of father to the rude Galerius, and Maximian to the more refined and well-born Constantius; while each of the Augusti obliged his adopted son to repudiate his already wedded wife, and to assume the dangerous honours of an imperial son-in-law: thus bartering faith and independence for power and rank.

To the herdsmen of Sardaca, (the Cæsar-Armentarius of the wits of Rome,) was given Valeria, the daughter of the Emperor Diocletian. A creature so lovely, and so gifted, so high in rank and public estimation, may have readily reconciled the rough soldier to his separation from the humbler and coarser partner of the peasant's choice. Constantius became the husband of Flavia Theodora, the

step-daughter of Maximian, and only child of Eutropia, by a noble Syrian, her first husband.

The wit of Theodora was an inheritance from her mother, and her beauty is attested by her medals: yet thus portioned, with such advantages of person and of birth, there was an obvious reluctance to this illustrious marriage on the part of Constantius; and Diocletian gave a singular importance to his divorce, by every legal form, that could mark the validity of the first marriage and his own suspicion of the preference felt by the new Cæsar, for the earlier ties of his youth, over the new alliances of his policy and ambition.

While the brave but gentle Constantius was yet in the spring of his fame, and prime of his valour, he had become enamoured of the beautiful daughter of an innkeeper in the little bourg of Dripanum, at whose house he lodged on his march through Nicomedia from Persia. The charms, or wit, or, perhaps, the art of the plebeian beauty, succeeded in converting the passing fancy of the Roman general into a permanent affection, which terminated in marriage. That she followed her husband in his remotest campaigns, is proved by the uncertainty of the birthplace of their first-born son, which has been "the subject not only of literary, but of national dispute:" amidst the darkness of monkish inventions, and the partialities of more modern historians, it is scarcely yet ascertained, whether Britain or Dacia was the native place of one, whose existence became a great epoch in the world's history. "For, in the life of a roving soldier," (observes one of the ablest commentators on this disputed point,) "the place of his marriage, or of his children's birth, have little concern with each other."

That the conduct of the low-born wife of the illustrious Constantius had been governed by a consummate prudence, was proved by the quiet obscurity in which this early period of her life was passed: that her mind was cultivated and enlightened, was best attested by Constantius's consigning to her sole superintendence the education of his eldest son. The name of this devoted wife was Helena, that of

her son was Constantine:—the future saint and future hero of the Christian world, and the first founder of its state church. For not to Constantine, her imperial son, alone, be addressed the eulogy or reproach of Dante's fearless lines!* That son had never raised the cross, had not his mother placed it in his hands; nor would he have "conquered in its sign," had she not early taught him to win the age, by adopting the spirit of the age: thus making her own reforming and spiritual creed the great state engine of the times, the political expediency by which the supreme power was to be attained and consecrated.

Constantine, surnamed the great, was just eighteen, when his father, promoted by Diocletian to the rank of Cæsar, was sent to govern Britain; and the hearts of the mother and the son were still throbbing high, in the first outburst of their latent ambition, when the divorce of Constantius reduced Helena to despair, and her son to a state of obscurity, and degradation.

Separated from his mother, and summoned to the palace of Diocletian (who then held his court in Nicomedia), Constantine became the dependent guest and suspected captive of the master of his destinies. From his imperial prison he was only released, by being sent to join the army in Persia and Egypt; for Diocletian, to avoid complying with his father's request that he might have his son with him in Britain, (where Constantius then commanded,) exposed him to the perils of the most hazardous warfare.

History is silent on this darkest interval in the life of the bereaved and outraged mother of Constantine. But to Helena the epoch may have been one of intense purposes, and of profound cogitation. It was then that the greatest passions may have been brought to bear upon the highest views; and the sublimest vengeance ever perpetrated, a vengeance which turned a spiritual conviction to the accomplishment of the highest maternal ambition, may have

* "Ahi Costantino, di quanto male fu matre,
Non la tua conversion, ma quella dote,
Che di te prese il primo ricco Patre," &c.
Dante, Canto 1mo. p. 110.

been then first conceived and fostered. It was then that the fears of the anxious mother, and the indignation of the discarded wife, gave the intensity of personal wrongs to the zeal of enthusiastic faith! The gods of Olympus already trembled on their altars; and the high destiny of the future master of the world was determined even while he was yet fighting in the wars of Persia and Egypt, for the honours and station of a tribune, or was combating for life and death in a single contest with a giant barbarian and a "monstrous lion."*

The reign of Diocletian closed the imperial history of the west, with a glory suitable to the awful grandeur of the approaching crisis in the history of mankind, the greatest on record. Stamped as it was with the seal of Diocletian's own genius, it equally combined within itself the mighty fragments of the old civilisation, and the forming elements which were to constitute the new. Twenty years of brilliant public prosperity were passed by the emperor in fighting, conquering, travelling, and legislating,† while victories abroad, reforms at home, rebellions suppressed, revolts chastised, thrones overthrown, and dynasties restored, were the imposing results. The capital of the world was embellished and enlarged, and those of the remoter provinces beautified and raised in dignity and importance; and four imperial courts were maintained with Asiatic luxury in different parts of the world.‡

* "Galerius, or perhaps his own courage, exposed Constantine to single combat with a Sarmatian, and with a monstrous lion."

† "On lui dut plusieurs édits et réglemens très sages, dont on rétrouve quelques dispositions dans le code de Justinien."—*Hist. Univer.* One of the most beautiful of these enacted that none should be accused by the man he had served. "Banish gratitude from the earth," he said, "and you banish with it repose and happiness."

‡ These palaces and camps of the delegated Cæsars were at once the landmarks of concentrated power, and the signs of its approaching dissolution. On the division of the empire, of which Diocletian, however, remained the supreme head, he confided Illyria, Thrace, Macedonia, and Syria, to the brutal Galerius: Gaul, and Britain, (more fortunate,) were placed under the government of the enlightened Constantius, who held his military court at York. To Maximian, the emperor's superior colleague, the second Augustus, Italy and Spain were assigned; while Diocletian reserved for himself Asia and Africa, a natural preference, perhaps, in the son of the slave of Doclea.

Previously, the emperors (with few exceptions) had lived with their great officers as companions in arms. They had commanded as generals, judged as prætors, administered as consuls, and opened their palaces to the public, like the chief magistrates of a great commonwealth. But the court of Diocletian was the centre of all magnificence, the school of all refinement; and wherever it was held, in Rome or in Nicomedia, was mounted upon the oriental type. Surrounded by slaves, (the unsightly guardians of exclusive habits,) and jealously protected from intrusion by guards (stationed even in the interior apartments, to which ministers and favourites alone had access), the emperor, to mark still more widely the distinction between himself and the rest of mankind, exchanged the purple woollen mantle of the Cæsars for a robe of golden tissue, and habitually bound his brow with the gemmed diadem of Asiatic despotism.

By an imperial edict, he, also, commanded the Roman people to address him as Dominus, (a style particularly offensive to Roman ears,) and he humbled them still further by calling them "his subjects," a term till then unknown. The creation of new personal distinctions changed the associations of the people with their institutions: dukes, counts, viscounts, referendaries, chamberlains, and other new titles, replaced names and offices which had hitherto recalled the ancient liberties of Rome; and the deepening shadows, which the dark ages now cast before them, gave, amidst the apparent splendour, indication of the coming obscuration of all the existing remnants of human independence.

This weakness of the emperor was, however, lost in the halo of his genius and his fortune; and his reign is quoted as the greatest, and his laws as the wisest, which glorified the last century of the empire. But if rhetoricians in their declamations, and poets in their eulogies, (for historians there were then none,*) have given the full measure of

* The dry and cold abbreviations of Capitolinus and of Aurelius Victor, meagre and incomplete as they are, scarcely give to these writers a claim to the dignity of historians.

praise to the glory, the genius, the valour, and the justice of Diocletian, his reign has been marked for the execration of posterity by that terrible epithet, "the era of martyrdom."

Meantime, the glorious intellect of antiquity was silent. The philosophy, the poetry, the eloquence of Greece, so ostentatiously, yet so servilely assumed to itself by Rome, were becoming scarcely more than a tradition; and, had not events spoken for themselves, in times so fatal to the spiritual nature of man, even the fasti of this reign, so important and portentous in themselves, might have escaped the knowledge of posterity.

Still mind, though degraded, was not quenched; for while the forms of government and the calamities of war were combining in the west, to obliterate that literature and philosophy, which, (maugre the great names of Cicero, of Virgil, of Horace, of Livy, of Tacitus, and of the other luminaries of the gold and silver ages of Roman classicality,) never took a firm and deep root in the Roman intellect,—other causes were in operation in the eastern part of the empire, to rouse the dormant spirit of inquiry, and to enlist the passions on the side of the most abstract and transcendental speculation.

The establishment of the successors of Alexander in the East, had brought the philosophy of the Greeks into the closest contact with the religious systems of Egypt and Palestine; and had forced a comparison between their doctrines, which, in the first instance, must have given a shock to the partisans of each. The Jews, established in Alexandria by the exigencies of commerce, were early in the field, studying the dogmas of the several sects into which philosophical Greece was divided, comparing them with their own national doctrines, and finally endeavouring to amalgamate the whole into one common system.

It was thus that the sect of new Platonists arose, whose opinions gave so decided a colour to the Christianity of the third century, and assisted so largely in determining its subsequent fortunes. Of the various systems of the Greeks, that of Plato best accorded, by its mysticism, its obscurity,

and its subjugation to verbal imposition, with the belief in miracles, and in communications between man and superior intelligences, then current in the East. That system, which, at long distant intervals, has revived and recommended itself to acceptance, not more for the elegant language and persuasive eloquence of its founder, than for its aptitude to flatter the vanity of its adepts, and to astonish the vulgar by its sublime obscurity, very naturally obtained possession of the Asiatic imagination; and though the new sect professed to be, and aimed at being, eclectic, and at combining all opinions in one harmonious whole, yet the doctrines of the Platonicians, as the most acceptable, eventually swallowed up the rest, and became the foundation of the new system. In this amalgamation, both sets of ideas were respectively modified: the Jewish (and subsequently the Christian systems), became subtilized, and imbued with more philosophic forms; and the transcendentalism of the old Platonists received a deeper dye of vagueness and of mystery from the thaumatology of the East.*

Of the early influence of this philosophy upon Christianity, there exists distinct evidence in the opening verses of St. John's gospel, which are pure Platonism in language and in thought; and it is not perhaps too much to refer all the disputes which divided and disturbed the infant church, to a contest between those who, in forming their religious creeds, adopted, and those who rejected, more or less, of the new philosophy.

Several traits in the life of Plotinus mark this Asiatic influence upon his doctrines. His disciples, under his

* Of Plotinus, the great writer of the new Platonists, it is observed: "Le caractère mystique et transcendental de sa philosophie la rend souvent obscure et inintelligible. Si on exige des idées claires et précises, auxquelles correspondent des objets réels, on est forcé de convenir que Plotin lui-même n'en avoit pas toujours de semblables. Mais quand on parvient à se mettre à la place d'un homme, qui s'abandonne sans réserve aux égaremens d'une imagination échauffée et presqu'en delire (condition indispensable lorsqu'on veut trouver quelqu'intérêt au système de Plotin), alors on parvient à se former au moins un idée générale de la manière dont il a extravagué en philosophie."—*Buhle Histoire de la Phil. Moderne*, vol. i. p. 548.

guidance, adopted the strangest practices. One of them, Rogatian, a Roman prætor, sold his goods, freed his slaves, and abandoned his charge, to live freely in the open air (an Essenian, if not a Christian practice of the day); and the women more especially adopted his chimeras, and abandoned themselves to his reveries, so congenial to their lively imaginations and excitable fibre; (another striking trait of the manners of the Therapeutes and Christian innovators.)

While philosophy thus spiritualized the intelligence of the Asiatic population, religious enthusiasm spread its influence among all classes; and when the progress of Christianity finally carried the leaven of this fermentation into all parts of the empire, the women were most especially induced to interest themselves in the controversies to which it gave rise. Among these, the women of the imperial families became conspicuous for their zeal and pertinacity. They took the broad road of free inquiry; and though often bewildered and seduced by the metaphysical distinctions of the prevailing party among the Christians, still their object was truth; and their health, their repose, even their lives, were sacrificed in its pursuit. Combating in the field of speculative opinion with the ardour of neophytes, and the zeal of apostles, they protected Lactantius,* studied Eusebius, adopted the metaphysics of Porphyry, and opposed the scepticism of Hierocles.

While the mothers and wives of the reigning sovereigns were thus spiritually occupied, Galerius and Maximian panted for a pretext to exterminate the religion, thus favoured, by destroying its professors. They had with them on this subject the bigotry of the people, the interests of the pontiffs, the whole force derived from ancient establishments, the vices of the profligate, and the fears of the

* Lactantius, for his eloquence, was invited by Diocletian to teach rhetoric in Nicomedia; but, from his ignorance of Greek, he had few followers. When there, his humanity was excited by the persecutions of the Christians, which probably became the occasion of his own conversion.

superstitious. But, above all, they had with them, the desolating dissensions, raised among the Christians themselves, on vain and frivolous questions, the departure of the religion from its primitive simplicity, and the rankness of its corruptions,* springing from the wealth and pride of its prelates, and from its dereliction of the free and independent constitution of the primitive church.†

Diocletian, too careless of the progress of a sect which he probably despised, and Constantius, too sagacious not to have discovered the hold it had gained on the minds of mankind, were both inclined to toleration. But while the four heads of the imperial government were thus diversely affected, the genius, the learning, and the leisure of the Empress Prisca, and of her daughter Valeria, (whom Diocletian had bestowed upon the unlettered Galerius,) led them to listen with respect to the doctrines of Christianity, and to commune with its orators and writers. It was supposed that they had been privately baptized; and it is certain that several of the principal officers of their household, and even of Diocletian's, followed the example of the empresses, and (protected by their influence) adopted the faith which they had embraced. Although their offices obliged the latter to accompany the emperor when he witnessed the rites of the state polytheism, they enjoyed, with their wives, children, and slaves, the free exercise of the new religion.

While the august mother and her imperial daughter (the most accomplished women of their day) were thus raising a Christian shrine in the very palace of the persecutor, (and doubtless delayed the execution of his cruel policy,) the repudiated Helena, in her cloistral retreat, from which she was so soon called to become an empress, was meditating her great scheme of holy ambition, and dreaming that dream, which her son was so soon to accomplish. Constantia, too, the daughter of Constantine and Theodora, was studying, on the remote shore of Britain, those works which led the earliest disciple of Arius,

* Hist. of the Church. † Eusebius.

(ere his doctrines had assumed a tangible form, or were stigmatized by a name,) to become, in future days, his able protectress and saviour.

At this momentous epoch of the great struggle between the religion of the state and the religion of opinion, there was another female who, though but an homely and an aged woman, was yet pertinacious as the youngest, and influential as the wisest. This was the mother of Galerius, who appears to have followed her son, in all his higher fortunes, and to have kept alive his zeal for the altars of his fathers. A worshipper of "the mountain gods," and eminently bigoted and superstitious in her belief;* the devotion of Valeria, her spiritual and Christian daughter-in-law, alarmed her fears for the salvation of her son. Hating, also, the Empress Prisca (as mothers-in-law sometimes hate, in the jealousy of maternal affection), she had thus another reason for persecuting the creed which her rival protected, and for inflaming the passions of Galerius against the Christians.

From the two poor servant maids, tortured by Pliny in the reign of Trajan, (the early martyrs and ministers of the religion of the people,) to the powerful and accomplished princesses, who now protected its bishops, and defended the doctrines of its learned fathers, no link in the chain of female agency was broken. The Empress Mammea seeking out and hearing Origen, Zenobia protecting Paul of Samosata, in part adopting his doctrines, (the unitarianism of the times,) Prisca and Valeria studying with Eusebius and Lactantius, and converting the court of Diocletian to Christianity,—formed a continuous chain, upholding the spiritual nature of that sex, without whose aid few religions have ever been founded, and none perpetuated.

In this divided state of opinions and of interests, the fanaticism of a centurion furnished Galerius, (the least tolerant of the Roman Cæsars), with a pretext for severity, which savoured, however, less of religious persecution,

* Mulierad modum superstitiosa.

than of military rigour. At his suggestion, and by his influence with Diocletian, (strengthened by his military successes, and a winter's residence with the emperor in Nicomedia,) a general persecution was undertaken. The Christians were declared disqualified for office in the household, the army, or the state. A council of courtiers decided on the fate of a population convicted of the forbidden belief; and the ministers of Diocletian, with a numerous body of guards, marched in order of battle upon the principal church of Nicomedia, situated on a beautiful eminence in the heart of the city, where, towering in grandeur above the imperial palace, it had long stood the envy of the orthodox anti-reformers of the age.

The mob, which followed the constituted authorities, broke open the doors of the sanctuary, to plunder and destroy; but they found nothing to commit to the flames, except some volumes of the sacred books. The holy building was, however, levelled to the ground; and an edict against the Christians was published on the following day, the type of all future penal laws against liberty of conscience. Diocletian, it is true, the husband of a Christian wife, and the father of a Christian daughter, was still averse from the shedding of blood; and he endeavoured to moderate the rage of Galerius, who proposed to burn alive all who refused to sacrifice to his gods: still the punishments inflicted on the obstinate Christians might, even in the days of direst modern intolerance, be deemed sufficiently rigorous and effective.

The destruction of the Christian temple was closely followed by the burning of the emperor's palace. Even the very bedchamber of Diocletian, guarded as it was, was in flames. A lesson was thus read, which, had it been listened to, would have saved torrents of blood from flowing, and protected the remnants of ancient civilisation from utter extinction.

The Christians were naturally suspected of the deed, for they had friends in the palace, and their advocates were in the very apartments of the emperor. Persons high in office were, therefore, thrown into prison, perse-

cuted, and tortured; while both city and court were polluted by bloody executions. A multitude of the proscribed sect took refuge in the Syrian desert; others sought protection amidst the barbarians of the north, (on whose minds the light of the new faith was breaking;) and the two empresses were forced, by the dangers of their position, or the imperial command, to repair to the temples, and sacrifice at the altars of the gods and their masters.

Maximian and Galerius continued to execute the persecuting edict in the provinces under their sway; but the wise and humane Constantius turned the blunt edge of the sword he was commanded to raise in Britain, and spared the religion which his wife Helena had taught him to respect, and his daughter Constantia implored him to protect. Diocletian, too, halted half-way in his inglorious and sanguinary path of persecution; and, leaving to his successors the melancholy pre-eminence of dominating and ravaging the world, he abdicated its throne, and retired into the pivacy of domestic life, to enjoy that happiness which a throne had not given him.

He had either forced or persuaded his fierce colleague, Maximian, to abdicate with himself; and he was accompanied in his delicious retreat at Salona by his accomplished wife, the Empress Prisca, whose daughter Valeria succeeded to her mother's honours, as the reigning Augusta of the day.

The successors of Diocletian and Maximian (the good and evil principle of the Roman government), were their two Cæsars, the faithful representatives of their respective and peculiar idiosyncrasies,—the fierce and rude-born Galerius, and the high-bred and humane Constantius. The two Augusti held their seats of empire in the most distant regions,—Galerius in Nicomedia, Constantius in Britain: for the eternal city, its "original glory half eclipsed," was already abandoned by its emperors, and rapidly sinking into a provincial capital.

On the elevation of Galerius and Constantius to supreme authority, they shared their imperial labours with four Cæsars—with Licinius (the future husband of Constantia),

with Maximin, the rude, uncultured nephew of Galerius, with Severus, his creature, and with Maxentius, (the worthy son of the abdicated emperor, Maximian,) who blended all the ferocity of his barbarian father, with all the vices of a Roman voluptuary.

But Galerius, the son-in-law of Diocletian, the conqueror of the Persians, the persecutor of the Christians, had firmly established his power over three-fourths of the monarchy; and, assuming the gorgeous trappings of Diocletian, in his court of Nicomedia, only waited the death of Constantius (already declining in health and years), to establish himself sole master of the Roman world. The flight of his captive guest, or hostage, Constantine, in the middle of the night, from the imperial palace in Nicomedia, his arrival in his father's court at York, the dying Constantius's last wishes, so flattering to the pride and virtues of the son of Helena, the elevation of that son to the rank of Cæsar by his father's will, and by the election of the legions, and the new emperor of the West despatching ambassadors to the supreme Augustus in the East, dissolved at once the mighty vision of power which had so long dazzled the ambitious views of Galerius.

More violent than Marius, more cruel than Nero, Galerius was further excited by the successful revolt of Maxentius in Africa, and by the return of his father Maximian to the throne, which he had abdicated, and which, in his deathless ambition and jealousy of Constantine, he again resumed.*

The lists of sanguinary contention were again thrown open to the restless passions and personality of man. The six imperial candidates, Augusti and Cæsars, started for the prize of supremacy, over the prostrated rights of humanity, to be won by force and violence. In the prime of their strength, their crimes, and their ambition, the combatants rushed from their respective head-quarters, to fight the last great battle for universal empire. The mighty drama, so long enacting on the theatre of the world, was

* A. D. 306.

hastening to its last act. The catastrophe was terrible and sublime; the details were awful and heart-rending. How the great fight was fought, and with what results, even ignorance now is not ignorant; for history has left no fact untold, no event unfamiliarized. Through the tissue of its gorgeous commonplaces, and conventional phraseology, its "mingled web of good and ill together," it has woven, unintentionally, if not unconsciously, the fine and scarcely palpable thread of woman's agency; preserving, through the coarser and baser texture of human actions, the precious influence of the affections, the ennobling power of all that is spiritual in humanity.

Among the great conflicts which agitated mankind in the commencement of the fourth century, (a portentous interval, between the precise epoch of the destruction of an old, and the creation of a new society,) the women suffered much, endured firmly, and loved and served unflinchingly; and though the domestic history of these dreadful times may have furnished examples of many heroic Sempronias,* and many zealous and generous Aglaes, still the authenticated lives of the historical women of the age are at once so epic and so exemplary, that the Roman empresses most aptly and illustratively close the painful but not inglorious story of the women of the empire.

The defeat and death of the Emperor Galerius left his widow, Valeria, exposed to imminent danger. Her father, the late mighty Diocletian, powerless and aged, was sinking in years and maladies, in his solitude at Salona; and her strong-minded mother, the Empress Prisca, alone remained in her indestructible affection, to aid her by her counsels, and to protect her by her august presence.

Valeria was in the prime of her life and her beauty; "she

* Pendant le court regne de ce prince feroce et insensé (Maxentius) Rome fut inondée de sang, et livrée au pillage, la pudeur des femmes les plus distinguées était immolée à la brutalité de ses desirs. Sophronie, chrétienne, et mairée à un illustre senateur, voyant sa maison entourée par les satellites du tyran, crut pouvoir sans offenser Dieu s'affranchir du déshonneur. Elle se poignarda, et le sang de cette nouvelle Lucrèce aurait peut-être armé les Romains contre la tyrannie, s'ils n'étaient contenu par une armée dévouée à Maxence.—*Segur, Hist. Univ.*

had fulfilled, and even surpassed, the duties of a wife;" and, childless herself, she had adopted a natural son of her husband's, (though born after her marriage with the emperor,) and had invariably displayed towards the unfortunate Candidianus the tenderness of a mother.

The exigencies of her position had induced Valeria to visit the court, in order to seek the temporary protection of Maximin, the nephew of Diocletian, and her nearest kinsman. She was accompanied by her mother and adopted son, and was received by the imperial successor of her husband with the cordiality and respect due to relatives so near, and to persons so august. Maximin, however, sensual,* cruel, and avaricious, marked out the widowed empress as the victim of all those fearful passions. Her personal charms, her ample possessions, determined him to divorce his own wife, who was living, and to demand the hand of Valeria in marriage; and his fears for her views as to the son of the late emperor, and his distrust of her political influence—a distrust afterwards entertained by Licinius,†—increased his desire to possess her. To a proposition so indecent—for Valeria was still in deep mourning for Galerius—she replied as became the daughter and widow of emperors; but the reply was tempered by that prudence which her defenceless condition compelled her to observe. She represented to the persons whom Maximin had employed on this occasion, "that even if honour could permit a woman of her character and dignity to entertain a thought of second nuptials, decency at least must forbid her to listen to his addresses at a time, when the ashes of her husband and his benefactor were still warm, and while the sorrows of her mind were still expressed by her mourning garments. She ventured to declare that she could place very little confidence in the

* "He introduced a custom, having the force of a law, that no person should marry a wife, without the permission of the emperor."—*Lactantius.*

† Il y a aparence que la famille de Galére ne fut exterminée que parceque Licinius, tyran ombrageux, a craigné que les pretensions qu'elle pouvait avoir sur l'empire, ne servoient de prétexte à des mouvements populaires et des révoltes.—*Hist. Univ.*

professions of a man, whose cruel inconstancy was capable of repudiating a faithful and affectionate wife."

On this repulse, the love of Maximin was converted into fury; and, as witnesses and judges were always at his disposal, it was easy for him to cover his fury with an appearance of legal proceedings, and to assault the reputation as well as the happiness of Valeria. Her estates were confiscated, her domestics devoted to the most inhuman tortures, and several innocent and respectable matrons, who were honoured with her friendship, suffered death on a false accusation of adultery. The empress herself, together with her mother Prisca, was condemned to exile; and as they were ignominiously hurried from place to place, before they were confined to a sequestered village in the deserts of Syria, they exposed their shame and distress to the provinces of the East, which, during thirty years, had respected their august dignity.

Diocletian made several ineffectual efforts to alleviate the misfortunes of his daughter; and, as the last return that he expected for the imperial purple which he had conferred upon Maximin, he entreated that Valeria might be permitted to share his retirement of Salona, and to close the eyes of her afflicted father. He entreated, but as he could no longer threaten, his prayers were received with coldness and disdain; and the pride of Maximin was gratified, in treating Diocletian as a suppliant, and his daughter as a criminal.

The death of Maximin seemed to assure the empresses of a favourable alteration in their fortunes. The public disorders had relaxed the vigilance of their guard; and they easily found means to escape from the place of their exile, and to repair, though with some precaution, and in disguise, to the court of Lucinius. His behaviour in the first days of his reign, and the honourable reception which he gave to young Candidianus, inspired Valeria with a secret satisfaction, both on her own account, and on that of her adopted son. But these grateful prospects were soon succeeded by horror and astonishment; and the bloody executions which stained the palace of Nicomedia,

sufficiently convinced her that the throne of Maximin was filled by a tyrant more inhuman than himself. Valeria consulted her safety by a hasty flight, and, still accompanied by her mother Prisca, they wandered above fifteen months through the provinces, concealed in the disguise of plebeian habits. They were at length discovered at Thessalonica; and as the sentence of their death was already pronounced, they were immediately beheaded, and their bodies thrown into the sea. The people gazed on the melancholy spectacle; but their grief and indignation were suppressed by the terrors of a military guard. Such was the unworthy fate of the wife and daughter of Diocletian. We lament their misfortunes, we cannot discover their crimes; and, whatever idea we may justly entertain of the cruelty of Licinius, it remains a matter of surprise that he was not contented with some more secret and decent method of revenge.*

When this tragedy, (to which one, who "nothing extenuates" where woman is concerned, has done such justice,) was enacting in the East, another was perpetrated in the West, of which a woman, eminent for her rank, her beauty, and her misfortunes, was chosen as the victim and agent. Policy had induced the old Emperor Maximian, the tyrant and enemy of Constantine and Christianity, to give him his daughter Fausta in marriage; and the courtly lady of the Lateran† became the second wife of the aspiring sovereign of Gaul and Britain. The murderous discords of her family involved Fausta in crimes she abhorred. Neither age nor adversity could disarm the savage ferocity of her father Maximian, who was hurled a second time from the throne of the empire, by his own unnatural son and worthy successor, Maxentius. He sought refuge with his son-in-law, Constantine, in Gaul, who, even after the implacable old man had kindled a revolt against him at Marseilles, yet spared his life, and

* Gibbon.

† The Lateran Palace was the residence of the Princess Fausta, after whom it is named, in some of the earliest synodical records, "*Domus Faustæ.*"

received him in his palace at Treves. Maximian repaid his clemency by forming new designs upon his life; and the use to which he endeavoured to turn the filial submission of his daughter Fausta,* though avoided by a horrible alternative, paints the moral density of times, in which such monsters could be raised over the destinies of mankind.

But while the episode of woman's martyrdom, in her feeling, or her faith, was thus painfully enacting in the privacy of domestic life, or among the dissolute scenes of a court, the great theatre of the world was clearing out for the performance of the last scene of one of its own greatest and most tragic dramas.

The rival actors were Maxentius and Constantine, the sons of the late supreme emperors, Maximian and Constantius. Maxentius, enthroned in the palace of the world's capital, diademed with the crown of Diocletian, surrounded by all the imagery and associations of the Cæsars, invested with the supreme power by the Roman senate and army, adhered to the ancient religion of the empire, and was dis-

* "Maximien, resolu de se venger, jura de donner la mort à celui qui venait d'epargner ses jours. Quelques mois après, se trouvant encore à Marseille avec Constantin, dont l'âme généreuse ne pouvait soupçonner un pareil crime, il découvrit son affreux projet à sa fille Fausta employant tour à tour les présens, les prières, les promesses, les menaces, pour l'engager à laisser ouvert pendant la nuit l'appartement de son epoux, et à éloigner les gardes qui veillaient à sa sûreté. La malheureuse impératrice, forcée de donner la mort à son père si elle parlait, ou à son epoux si elle se taisait, ne sut long-temps, dans cette, affreuse position, qui elle devait trahir ou sauver: enfin l'amour conjugal l'emporta; elle promit à son père d'obéir, et révela tout à Constantin. Ce prince, plus consterné qu'effrayé d'un tel forfait, refusait d'y croire, et voulut en avoir la preuve évidente avant de le punir. Suivant les mœurs barbares de ce temps, les esclaves étaient à peine comptés au nombres des hommes: Constantin sacrifie les jours d'un eunuque pour dévoiler l'affreuse vérité, le place dans son lit, éloigne les gardes, et se tient à portée de tout voir. Au milieu des ombres et du silence de la nuit, Maximien armé d'un poignard, s'avance, voit avec une barbare satisfaction que sa fille a dégagé sa marche de tout obstacle; il entre dans la chambre, s'approche du lit, enfonce à plusieurs reprises son fer dans le sein de l'esclave, il s'écrie: Mon ennemi est mort. Je suis maître de l'empire! A peine il a prononcé ces mots, Constantin parait à sa vue, l'atterre par ses regards menaçans, et change sa cruelle joie en honte et en désespoir."—Constantin ne pardonna plus, et Maximien périt, juste victime d'une coupable ambition, qui ne put s'éteindre qu'avec sa vie.—*Hist. Univ.*

graced by all the vices of the worst of its masters. Remaining shut up in the security of the walls of his capital, he left his defence to the victorious troops of Italy and Africa, a hundred and eighty thousand veterans, jealous and ardent in the cause of tyranny, though hating the tyrant they served. The army of Constantine, rude, if not undisciplined, amounted not to half the number; and, as with the spirit of Hannibal, and the rapidity of Cæsar, he ascended the steep acclivities of the Cottian Alps, at the head of his Christian Gauls, his mind must have been agitated by dark doubts, and his hopes of victory disturbed by gloomy apprehensions. The name of Rome was still redoubtable to men's imaginations; and the veterans against whom he was to lead his barbarous legions, had lately defeated the disciplined forces of Severus, and the experienced legions of Galerius.

In the momentous interval that occurred between the issue of the contest, it is remarkable that both the aspiring prize-fighters for universal empire had recourse, in their anxiety, to female inspiration, by which they alike sought to learn their destiny, and to shape their actions.

Maxentius resolved on consulting the sibylline books. But by whom were these prophetic volumes composed? It was believed by wise women in the antique times, when almost every region had its sibyl, who was considered as the authorized interpreter of futurity. In these sacred volumes, Maxentius read that "the enemy of Rome was destined to be destroyed;" and he hurried on, to the accomplishment of his own ruin.

Constantine, too, had his tutelary female, the Erythrian sibyl; often consulted in his younger days, and now haply not forgotten. But she may not have responded to his hopes, since the influence and power of other counsels and other prophecies took possession of his mind. His mother Helena, her faith, and the cross she so often placed in his infant hands, may have mingled their associations with his sterner views, his vague hopes, his earnest and harassing cogitation and doubts, amounting to delirium; and then, in the weariness of conjecture, and in the exhaustion of

fatigue, he might have dreamed that dream, and seen that sign, in which he conquered. The miracle may have been thus one of nature's own working, through her physiological operations; and if, in after-times, he deceived the world, he may have then been deceived himself.

The scene of this vision has been variously placed, but never positively authenticated; and poetry might, with much probability, lay it among the Alpine solitudes of Mount Cenis. During the hot noontide halt of the army (the time of its occurrence asserted by Constantine himself), while his rude Christian soldiers lay scattered round him, in the dull and doubtful repose, that vibrates between vigilance and sleep, the emperor, awakening from this vision of his heated mind, may have startled them from their obedient slumbers to tell his dream; and, pointing to some solar phenomenon, that crimsoned the canopy of heaven, (incidental to the sublime regions they occupied,) he may have told them, with prophetic emphasis, to conquer through that sign which already irradiated their helmets, and shone upon their bucklers. The rush of the enthusiast army down the Alps into the lovely plains of Lombardy, may well be conceived; and long before the elaborate and imperial Labarum, half Christian, half pagan, could have been fabricated, the simple crucifix of the soldiers' worship must have carried victory to the walls of Rome, and made its yet pagan emperor master of the world.

By the successive victories of Constantine, from his first assuming the purple at York, to his final conquest over Licinius in Nicomedia, the Roman empire was again united under one emperor. The foundation of Constantinople, and the establishment of the Christian empire, were the immediate and memorable consequences of this revolution.*

It was then that the foundress of Constantine's greatness, the presiding genius of his fortunes, his mother Helena, emerged from her mysterious obscurity, and took

* A. D. 324.

her place on the steps of that throne to which her counsels and astuteness had led him. Constantine acknowledged her services by every public manifestation of gratitude and respect. Almost the first act of his power was to share it with her to whom in part he owed it. He founded a city by the name of Helenopolis in her honour; he gave her the title of Augusta, and raised her at once to all the dignities of a Roman empress. He presented her to the army with more distinction than Agrippina had ever enjoyed; and he admitted her to his council, as Alexander Severus had done his mother Mammea.

But what was of far greater import and weight, he placed her at the head of his exchequer, when a new system was struggling to establish its despotism over men's minds, for which the agency of wealth was especially wanted, to give a uniform direction to the impulses of fanaticism, to concentrate the rising power of opinion, and to mould it to the purposes of state policy. However humiliating to the reason of the age, however injurious to the purity of truth, such an agent was well adapted to the circumstances of the contingency. The savage cruelty and wasteful devastations of a rapidly disorganizing society called for any check that policy could devise, and almost justified any means that could stop the current of calamity, and give repose to the wretched species.

To quell passion by dogma, to idealize existence, to give a new spring to an exhausted and purposeless civilisation, and to tame the passions by subduing the intellect, if not the noblest expediency, was that alone suited to the actual condition of man. Judging also by the experience of three hundred years, this influence of wealth was, humanly speaking, necessary to preserve the new religion from being divided and subdivided, till its essence should be lost in inextricable dispute, and to prevent it from becoming another and supererogatory cause of dissension and discord. The momentary advantage was indeed great; but it was purchased at no less a price than a long and perfect prostration of intelligence to authority,—by the sleep of a thousand years, and a subsequent struggle of

principle, of which even the nineteenth century cannot foreshow the term. The Irish catholic and the English dissenter are still paying the penalty of opinions and of interests then created.

In bringing about this new phasis of Christianity, and thus remodelling society, Helena was a principal, and as may be supposed from her antecedents, a sincere and zealous agent. Her eastern temperament lent itself to the growing mysticism of the rising church; her sufferings, under the fierce dispensations of pagan despotism, gave energy to her predilections; and her long seclusion from the busy haunts of life, (while secretly directing the councils of her ambitious son,) assisted her woman's sagacity in detecting the utter effeteness of the old state hierarchy, and in divining the efficiency of the new,—its closer adaptation to the peculiar temperaments of the races which were then overrunning the earth. All these circumstances, combining with her shrewd, astute, and deviceful disposition, may be believed at once to have mastered her convictions, and to have directed her after-conduct.

While Constantine legalized the Christian church, protected its members, and presided over its synods, Helena directed the treasures of the state to increasing its influence, and kindling a new species of fervour. During the three preceding centuries, the clergy had been supported by the voluntary oblations of the faithful; and while their spiritual authority had prospered under the dispensation, much church property had been accumulated. This property, wherever it had been diverted to other purposes by hostile emperors, was restored by Constantine to its original uses; and he enacted laws to promote its further increase.

But Helena, conscious how much further men are led by images to their senses, than by abstractions offered to their reason, turned the revenues assigned to her government to the adornment and solemnity of the ceremonies of the church. She founded temples in the new capital of the world, exceeding in splendour, if not beauty, the antique monuments of pagan worship, and strangely contrasting

with the chill catacombs and subterraneous crypts of the early congregations of Christians. The first church raised by Constantine, under the influence of Helena, was dedicated to the Divine Wisdom, clothed in a female form, under the invocation of Saint Sophia. Even the foundation of the imperial city itself was ascribed to the inspiration of the Virgin Mary, who was chosen its tutelar guardian.

Helena also encouraged, if she did not originate, a tender and imaginative devotion for localities, which associated the affections with belief. At the head of a numerous train of saints and saintesses, she commenced a pilgrimage to the scenes consecrated in the early history of Christianity, by which she must have contributed to multiply conversions, while she erected beacons to fix the eye of wavering credulity. At her bidding, churches arose over each consecrated spot; and the relics she sought for and distributed, and the reverence she inculcated for particular saints, (though they materialized the spirit of Christianity, and diverted its worship,) brought both nearer within the grasp and comprehension of a barbarous people,—sincere, but densely ignorant, when they were not, like the imperialist founder of the church himself, indifferent to all creeds and worships.

Philosophy may now deride, and Protestant rigour blame, this image-worship of an unawakened people; but the "nursing mother of the church" had a correct idea of the ardent temperament and sensitive impressionability of the population to which she addressed herself.* In throwing down the temple of Venus in Jerusalem, she raised a

* "It was, as might not unreasonably be anticipated, a female, the Empress Helena, the mother of Constantine, who gave, as it were, this new colouring to Christian devotion. In Palestine, indeed, where her pious activity was chiefly employed, it was the memory of the Redeemer himself which hallowed the scenes of his life and death to the imagination of the believer. Splendid churches arose over the place of his birth at Bethlehem; that of his burial, near the supposed Calvary; that of his ascension on the Mount of Olives. So far the most spiritual piety could not hesitate to proceed; to such natural and irresistible claims upon its veneration, no Christian heart could refuse to yield."—*Milman's History of Christianity*, Book III., chap. iii.

church on its foundation that surpassed in splendour Heliogabalus's temple of the sun. She lined its walls with precious marbles, she covered its roof with beaten gold; and, in the shower of light which fell upon its dome, she affected to image and perpetuate the angelic glory to which the fane was dedicated.

It was in this spirit, that she animated the faith of the coldest proselyte, by the presumed discovery of the true cross, a part of which she sent to Constantinople, and part left at Jerusalem. While, by the exercise of her temporal power, she rewarded the devotion of the stronger sex, by her spiritual exertions, she fanaticised the weaker, till the agency of woman in the great cause became universally acknowledged; and the zeal and numbers of the daughters of primitive Christianity were far surpassed, by those who now struggled to lay the foundations of its future supremacy. Female saints multiplied incalculably; and, as every region of Paganism had once its sibyl, so every city and town had now its peculiar female martyr, until, in the progress of time, the monstrous fiction of the eleven thousand virgins was deemed a fact of no extraordinary occurrence, and was universally accredited on the sole evidence of its imputed likelihood.

But the spiritual vocation of the empress-saint was far from impeding the course of her temporal policy. Influential in the church, and powerful in the state, time increased rather than diminished her mastery over the mind of Constantine. If, in the exercise of this influence, she may be justly accused of having urged him to the commission of one crime,* she is proved to have saved him from the guilt of others.

As commendable for her prescience and ability as eminent for her religious zeal, even in her profound retreat in the East she influenced the destiny, and protected the rights, of her son in the West (endangered by the intrigues of the partisans of his step-brothers, the sons of the Empress Theodora, and grandsons of the Emperor Galerius:†)

* The death of the Empress Fausta. † Crevier.

and when her anxiety for Constantine was tempered by his elevation to the throne of the empire, she still preserved the peace of her family and of the empire, by holding the three young princes, Julius, Constans, and Hannibalien, at a distance from the court and the capital, sometimes fixing their residence at Thoulouse, sometimes at Treves, and, by exempting them from all offices in the state, and command in the army. She finally engaged Constantine to establish them at Corinth, where, in the lovely climate of Greece, and amidst its classic scenes, they enjoyed that peace and freedom from crime, which their elder brother, Constantine the Great, never could have known on the throne of the world. The Emperor Julian, the son of Constans, taxes the conduct of Helena to his father and his uncles, as the artful stratagem of a jealous stepmother; while more impartial historians characterize it as a wise policy, favourable alike to the happiness of its objects and the tranquillity of the state.*

During the long absence of the empress-mother in the east, her place near the person of the emperor was assumed by another female, of a younger and fresher character, necessary, in its peculiar religious tendency, to the political schemes of Constantine, as the orthodox Helena herself. This was the ex-empress Constantia, his half-sister, the widow of Licinius, his rival, and his victim.

Constantine had scarcely established Christianity as the religion of the empire, when he was called upon to interpose his authority, to define its precise tenets, to appease the evil passions, and to quell the dissensions, by which the most learned and eminent of the Christians themselves were convulsing the infant church.

The controversy between the Bishop of Alexandria and Arius, (a presbyter of the same city), became so formidable, that the emperor himself was compelled to arbitrate between them and their partisans. This was a critical moment in ecclesiastical history. While three hundred

* De Tillemont n'y voit qu'une sage politique en supposant que le droit d'hérédité, dans les fils de l'empereur était reconnu et appuyé des suffrages du senat et des armées.—*Crevier.*

bishops were assembled at Nicæa, in Bithynia, to compose the Arian controversy, the emperor, (more provoked, than experienced in such quibbles, and considering the whole question as trifling and unimportant), may have taken a royal road to the knowledge of this imputed heresy, by referring to the woman, who exercised a secret influence over his mind. This was Constantia, so celebrated for her beauty, her genius, her virtue, and, above all, for her misfortunes.

Early converted to Christianity, she embraced the sect of Arianism, under the direction of her friend and preceptor, Eusebius, Bishop of Nicomedia. Either her zeal for religion, or her perilous position, had induced her to accept an invitation to the court and protection of her august brother (though that brother had taken the lives of her husband and her son). At first, she shared the influence which Helena held over Constantine; but, after her stepmother's death, she eventually obtained a complete ascendancy over his mind; and the unitarians of the fourth century owed to Constantia the protection of their infant sect, and the amelioration of their sufferings.*

Shortly after the return of Helena from Palestine, either worn out by the fatigues of her adventurous journeys, or breaking down under the domestic crimes and misery of her great but guilty son, she sickened and died in the arms of Constantine, in the fourteenth year of his reign, and at

* "The Arians," says an historian of the church, "had no cause to blush at the obligations which they likewise owed to two preceding empresses. Constantia protected their infancy and their misfortunes during the reign of Constantine, and Eusebia promoted their prosperity under the sceptre of Constantius." The Catholics could also boast of similar patronage; but Maimbourg (book vi.) establishes a very broad distinction as to the agency by which such aid was in each case administered. "As the devil (says that very rigid Catholic) had employed the assistance of princesses to introduce Arianism into the court of Constantine, of Constantius, and Valens, so God made use of the Empress Ælia Flaccilla, in order to prevent it from creeping into the court of Theodosius." In a later page (book xii. A. D. 590), the same author again alludes to the diabolical agency "which introduced the Arian heresy into the East by means of three women, and which was afterwards compensated by the divine benevolence in raising up three princesses, Clotilda, Indegonda, and Theodolinda, for the purification of France, Spain, and Italy."—*Waddington's History of the Church*, p. 82.

the advanced age of eighty. Raised from the bar of a provincial inn, to the throne of the world, she was the first Diva of the Christian state: for her earthly diadem was soon replaced by a heavenly crown; and the name of the Roman empress and foundress of the church has reached its double immortality, in the records of profane history, and in the album sanctorum of Catholic canonization.

In the summing up of the history of the women of the empire, from Augustus to Constantine, Helena offers an apt illustration of the influence of female intellect upon the great system by which society was to be governed under new interests. In her ready adoption of a spiritual reform were exerted freedom of inquiry, and mental decision; and in all she did there was intensity of affection, earnestness of purpose, and sincerity of profession. Compared with her august son, the balance inclines in her favour, even by the showing of the most favourable of his biographers.

History, in its facts, has given the life and deeds of Constantine, traced in imperishable characters. It has proved that he obtained his throne through blood and hypocrisy, that he gratified his private vengeance by the sacrifice of every natural tie, that he founded the empire of a church, in which he did not believe, upon the remains of a religion, to which he was superstitiously devoted, that he put to death his father-in-law, Maximin,—his brother-in-law, Licinius,—his nephew, the young Licinius,—his wife Fausta (after twenty-three years of marriage), and his own and eldest son, Crispus. It is recorded against him that, while he raised the cross at the head of his Christian army, he worshipped the god of his idolatry in the splendid temple of his pagan subjects; and that in founding the church as a state engine, he left for the last act of his life, the first of his Christian observance: for his baptism was rapidly succeeded by his death. He was tyrannic, cruel, false, and prodigal, obtaining the epithet of *great* from contemporary adulation; and if, during ten years, he was glorified by the epithet of founder of the public peace, the interval was one, in which his counsels were governed by

his mother's wisdom, to whom his deference and respect forms the one great redeeming virtue of his nature.

In the fourth century, the grave of the old world, and the cradle of the new, the story of the women of antiquity draws to its conclusion, and makes way for the greater history of the women of the middle ages. Throughout the long and varied series of events so rapidly sketched in these pages, the evidence to character in behalf of woman is uniform. That she has reflected many of the vices of her master, through outraged feelings and the influence of a false position, is no derogation from the general truth. This was but the accident of her career; her spiritual and affectionate activity in humanizing society, in averting evil, and promoting good, was the immediate law of her peculiar organization, and constant as its cause. To limit and pervert this agency has been the great object of the social and legal institutions of imperfect civilisation; to give a full developement to the design of nature, by better arrangements, will be the crowning labour of man's earthly warfare, his triumph over himself.

NOTES.

NOTES.

Note 1.

Female amanuenses, or secretaries, or "writers out of books," were by no means unusual in Rome, and the severity of a fine lady to her *Silvaria*, is quoted by one of the bitterest satirists of the Roman ladies on record. Vespasian, however, had a female amanuensis, Antonia, whom he greatly esteemed and confided in. Even the Christian fathers adopted this fashion, and Eusebius asserts that Origen had not only young men but young women to transcribe his works, which "they did with peculiar neatness." Among the accusations brought against the Roman women of his own time by Juvenal, is that of their learning; he bitterly attacks their presumption in studying Greek, their interlarding even their most familiar conversations with its elegant idioms and phrases, expressing even their sudden emotions themselves in the poetry of Greek exclamations; and among their other crimes of acquirement, he further accuses them of encroaching on the exclusive male prerogative of mind, by discussing philosophical subjects, quoting their favourite authors and scholiasts, and their *nurism* in affected exactness of grammar

as taught by Remmius Palæmon: at last they meddled with antiquarians, and described inscriptions upon coins, &c. He calls those "learned dames," as an ancient commentator has it, "Antiquaria, one that does refine or preserve ancient books from corruption, one studious of the old poets and historians, one that studies ancient coins, statues, and inscribed stones: lastly, such as use obsolete and antiquated words. All which, though they might be counted an overplus and curiosity in a woman, yet only the last is absolutely a fault."

NOTE 2.

Since the note on the Empress Crispina, vol. ii. page 106, went to press, I have found her medal among a small collection made for me at Rome by the late Signor Gabrielli (well known to English virtù.) The features of the young empress are exquisitely regular, her head-dress is precisely that most in vogue in the present day: she is styled Crispina Augusta.

NOTE 3.

"*The scene of this vision*," &c.

Since the printing of the last chapter of the second volume, I have seen that the reverend author of "The History of Christianity," just published,* has assumed

* The History of Christianity, by the Rev. H. Milman.

the probable scene of the memorable vision of Constantine, ("whatever explanation we adopt of the vision itself,") to have been "before the walls of Rome." To the authority of the sacred historian, and the choice of the elegant and eminent poet, I bow with that respect and admiration with which I have always perused his works.

THE END.

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